NIKIFOR GORNENSKI

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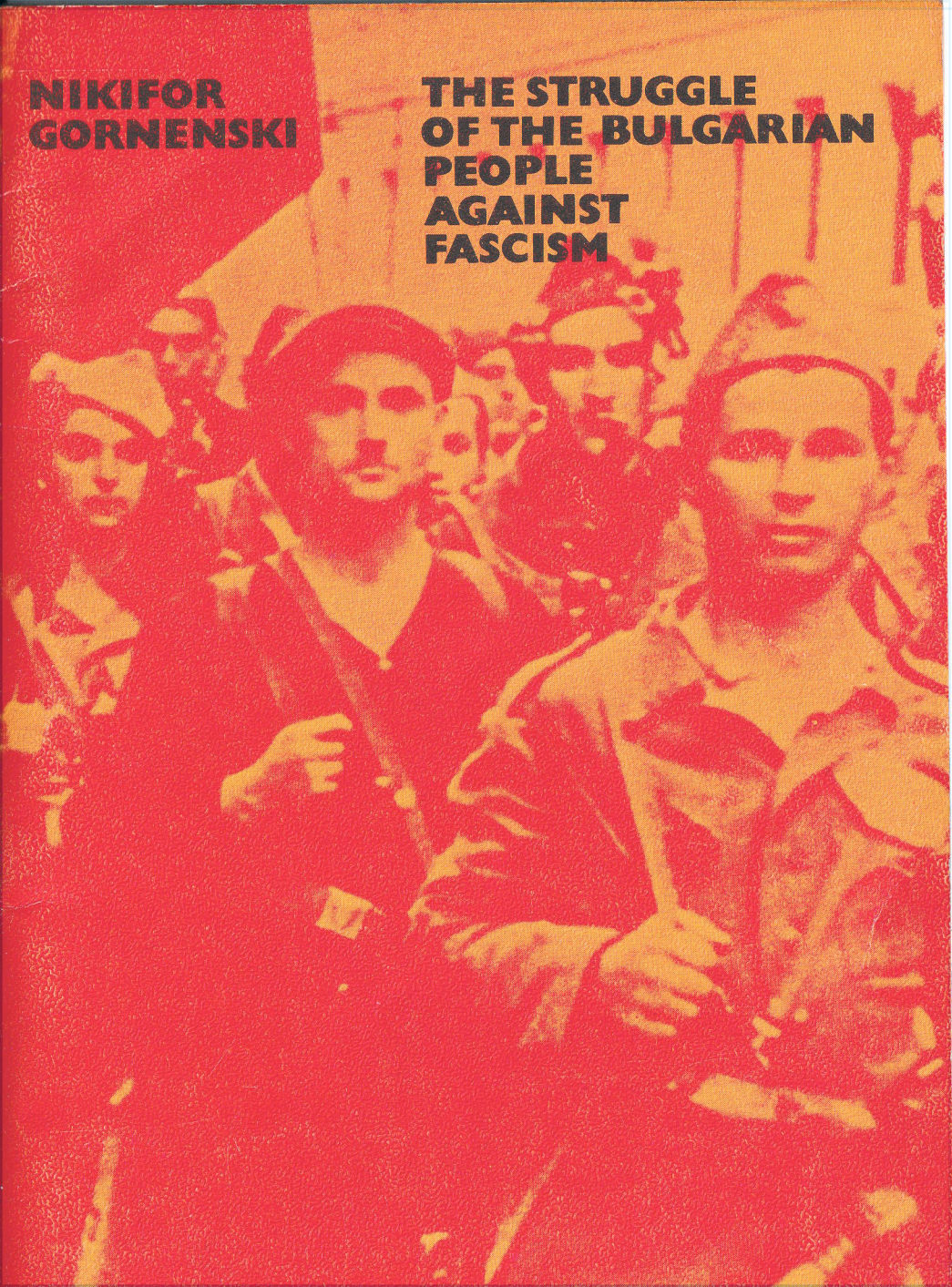

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# FASCISM IN BULGARIA

After the First World War, a political movement took shape among the most reactionary circles in Bulgaria (as well as in Italy and elsewhere) aimed at the establishment of an authoritarian method of government. Its purpose was to extend the social foundation of the ruling class by means of unbridled terrorism, nationalist extremism and fanaticism, social demagogy and political and ideological diversion. These methods had previously been used separately by all class societies. Now they were to be applied for the first time in a combination and at the same time were to be disguised under demagogical phrases about the mutually excluding loyalty to: a) the existing order and legality in society, and b) its revolutionary transformation; to c) democracy and d) the physical extermination of political and other opponents.

In Italy this movement was called fascism. It received the same name internationally. In no other country, however, did its adherents officially call themselves fascists. In Bulgaria they assumed names derived from 'national union', 'constitutional bloc', 'democratic union', 'union of the Bulgarian national legions', 'national social movement' and many others, but not a single one contained the word 'fascism'. What is more, the Bulgarian fascists always (whether in opposition or in power) pretended to be an original, purely Bulgarian phenomenon, without any element whatever of imitation of the Italian, German or any other brands of fascism. They, nevertheless, set themselves the same goals and tasks: to ban and to cruelly persecute the communist party and all other organizations of the proletariat; to limit as far as possible the bourgeois-democratic rights and liberties; to establish an overt terroristic regime; to fan chauvinism and racial intolerance; to find an anti-popular way out of the post-war revolutionary crisis and to consolidate capitalist dominance by means of the unification of all its champions in the person of the political parties, and to encourage nationalistic extremism, legal banditism, the reactionary forces of anti-communism and monarchism, by means of social demagogy, political provocations and ideological diversion.

The characteristic features of the Bulgarian brand of fascism were rooted in the specific historical, social and economic conditions existing in Bulgaria after the First World War. By that time, as well as afterwards, capitalism remained underdeveloped in the country. Bulgaria had embarked upon the capitalist road of development later than other

countries. It had fallen under the domination of foreign monopoly capitalism and had turned into an agrarian and raw material appendage of the industrialized West. Misshapen before it could flourish Bulgarian capitalism declined without having performed any progressive role.

The First Balkan War in 1912 ended in a national catastrophe for Bulgaria. Its participation (from 1915-1918) in the imperialist war of the great powers brought about another national catastrophe and Bulgaria's occupation by the Allied Forces. The peace treaty of Neuilly (1919) deprived Bulgaria of several regions which belonged to it prior to 1913. Refugees from these regions numbered about half a million (about one-tenth of the country's population). Worn out by the wars and hunger and privations, workers and peasants, craftsmen and employees, intellectuals and other middle class people, suffered under the economic ruin more than ever before. Their discontent, orientation to the left and revolutionary potential were constantly growing.

Although discredited by the two national catastrophes, the Bulgarian bourgeoisie tried to escape without punishment and to consolidate its domination by attempting to attract into the country's administration the Party with the most numerous membership – the Bulgarian Agrarian Party, and at the same time to preserve intact its own economic might. For this purpose it resorted to several coalitional governments, in some of which representatives of the Bulgarian Agrarian Party (BAP) and the Social Democratic Party (SDP) took part. Under the overwhelming pressure of the people's masses the bourgeoisie eventually had to allow a government to be formed by the Bulgarian Agrarian Party headed by Alexander Stamboliiski. From May 21, 1920 to June 9, 1923, the government (the most important sub-system of the bourgeois power), therefore, did not fit in with the bourgeois system. It protected the system from revolutionary cataclysms, but at the same time infringed upon some of the interests of the capitalists, chiefly through the implementation of a number of progressive reforms: the agrarian reform, progressive income tax, etc.

The bourgeois reaction was to resort to a fascist way of installing its own government in power. The Military Union (League) organized clandestinely in 1919, undertook the preparations for the violent overthrow of the agrarian government. In the spring of 1922, a new political formation *Naroden Sgovor* (National Union) was set up, which in reality represented a legalized branch of the Military Union. In the summer of that same year, three bourgeois parties set up the so-called Constitutional Bloc with the aim of overthrowing Alexander Stamboliiski's government.

The Agrarian democracy as a form of state administration was



replaced by a fascist dictatorship through a coup d'état on June 9, 1923 by the Military League and the National Union. Two months later the parties of the National Union and the Constitutional Bloc merged in the so-called *Democratichen Sgovor* (Democratic Union) with the object of lending a parliamentary appearance to the fascist dictatorship. This did not bring about the desired results and after 1925 the fascist rulers had to alleviate their rule of terror and to make use of the prestige of the monarch, King Boris III, who himself aspired to the establishment of a monarcho-fascist regime.

The world economic depression (1929-1933) threw Bulgaria's national economy into confusion. In order to appease the growing revolutionary unrest of the masses, the ruling class was again forced to resort to a coalition government, including representatives of the Bulgarian Agrarian Party. From 1931 to 1934 the administration was entrusted to the National Bloc formed by non-fascist parties, the most numerous of which was the Agrarian Party. The ousting of the Democratic Union was a setback to the fascist dictatorship. This setback, however, was not to be broadened and deepened. The former system was preserved and the position of the monarch was consolidated in it.

On May, 19, 1934, the Military Union and the Zveno political circle carried through another coup d'état. An authoritarian government was installed in power, which had certain anti-monarchic elements and a predominantly pro-French foreign policy orientation. Political parties were banned and the remnants of democratic rights entirely abolished. The Monarchy and the pro-German circles allowed the May 19, 1934 government to administer the country for a very short period, only long enough to place all the responsibility for the overthrow of the National Bloc government and the establishment of the so-called non-party authoritarian regime on it. In 1935 the monarchy carried out three governmental changes and succeeded in establishing an overt monarcho-fascist dictatorship, then proceeded to tie Bulgaria up with nazi Germany first of all economically and then politically. In 1941 monarcho-fascism turned Bulgaria into a nazi satellite and declared war on Great Britain and the United States. After the death of King Boris III (August 28, 1943) the monarcho-fascist dictatorship in Bulgaria was headed by a regents' council including: Prince Kiril, Professor Filov and General Mihov. From September 2 to 8 power was handed over to a coalitional non-fascist government led by Konstantin Mouraviev. With its help monarcho-fascism tried to conclude an armistice with Great Britain and the US and to receive their assitance against any popular uprising, also to frustrate the pursuit of the nazi forces in Bulgaria by the troops of the victorious Soviet Army, liberator

of Bulgaria. On September 9, 1944, the entire Bulgarian people rose in arms. They overthrew the fascist dictatorship and established their own people's democratic rule. They sought the most severe punishments for all activists and helpers of the former regime and from all Bulgarian citizens who had perpetrated crimes against the people and against mankind.

The struggle of the Bulgarian people against internal fascism climaxed in the historic victory on September 9, after continuing for two decades and passing through several periods of development: a) initial (united front); b) popular front; c) conclusive (people's liberation, Fatherland Front, after 1942).

The Bulgarian people's struggle against foreign fascism continued in their Patriotic War against nazi Germany.

## INITIAL PERIOD OF THE ANTI–FASCIST STRUGGLE IN BULGARIA

The Bulgarian Communist Party was the first to offer resistance to the fascist actions and crimes when its members repelled a fascist attack against one of its clubs in Sofia in May 1921. The fascist gang, however, succeeded in perpetrating another crime: it set on fire the People's House, the building of the Bulgarian Communist Party in the capital. The Party organized the workers for self defence against the fascists by raising the slogan 'Respond to the blow with a blow'. The communists took possession of secret papers disclosing the preparation of a fascist coup d'état with the participation of troops of the Russian White Guard, who were then quartered in Bulgaria and when the Party published these papers and called protest meetings and rallies in the capital and all over the country, the Agrarian Party (BAP) and its government took pertinent measures against the fascist plotters. A united front came practically into existence in this struggle against the onslaughts of reaction, although the BCP and the BAP acted independently and separately in this particular case.

The Fourth Congress of the Bulgarian Communist Party (1922) adopted the recommendations of the Executive Committee of the Communist International (ECCI) on the united workers front. The unity of action achieved between communists and agrarians was manifested in a number of clashes with the reactionary forces. This unity was also to be seen during the referendum, organized on Noveber 19, 1922, by the



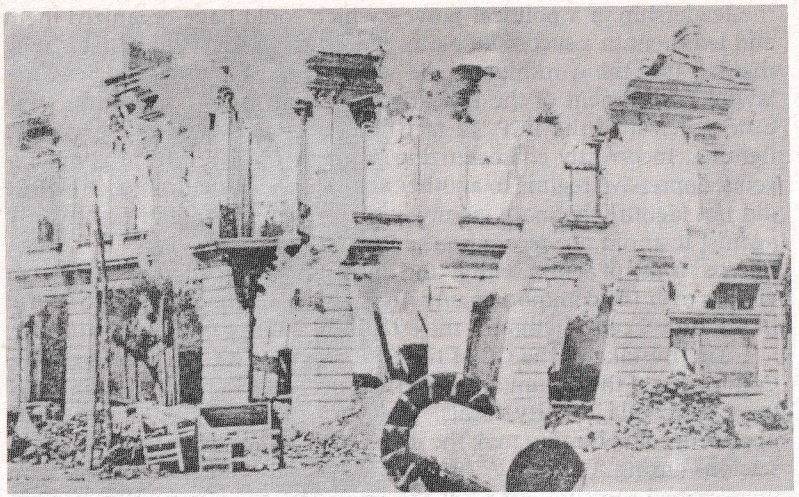
Agrarian Party government on the question of putting before the courts those responsible for precipitating the two national catastrophes (in 1913 and 1918). The overwhelming victory of agrarians and communists in the referendum showed that the tactics of the united front could be successfully applied not only among the proletarian, but also among the semi-proletarian and petty bourgeois mass of the working people.

The worker-peasant unity of action in 1922 should have led to a close cooperation between the BCP and the BAP. However, these two embracing and powerful political parties yielded to pernicious rivalry. The bourgeois reaction was quietly and secretly preparing their military fascist coup but the BAP and the BCP failed to perceive this danger, and instead of directing their fire against this danger they aimed it against each other.

The political disunity between agrarians and communists, their mistakes, their infatuations and conflicts, facilitated the coup d'état of June 9, 1923. The policy of the Bulgarian Agrarian Party of 'an independent peasant rule', of government without the communists and even directed against the communists, in the six months preceding the coup was shown by a number of persecutions against the Bulgarian Communist Party. The leadership of the Bulgarian Communist Party, for its part, defined these persecutions as being blows of the rural bourgeoisie. On June 9, 1923 the BCP declared that the Party should not take sides in the struggle between urban and rural bourgeoisie. By taking a 'neutral' stand, the Party leadership missed a favourable moment for the building of a militant worker-peasant alliance against the onslaught of fascism. It practically condemned the BCP to a renunciation of its obligation to organize and guide the working people's struggle against capitalism and reaction.

Following the June 9 coup hundreds of thousands of peasants and workers rose in arms in defence of the lawful government of the Bulgarian Agrarian Party, overthrown by the coup. They assumed power in a number of towns and many villages. The anti-fascist resistance was led by the local leaders of the BAP and the BCP who, at some places acted separately and at others, jointly. In Pleven the communists rose in arms headed by Assen Halachev and took control over a part of the town. Thousands of peasants in that region, led by the agrarian Tsonyu Matov, set out to help and surrounded the town. The combined blow of the insurrectionists from within and without the town would have ended in a real victory. Pleven, an extremely important centre of North Bulgaria, might have become a fortress of a worker-peasant anti-fascist alliance. The city organization of the BCP, however, received an order from the Party's Central Committee to take a neutral stand and it dis-

*Dimiter Blagoev (1856-1924), founder of the Bulgarian Communist Party*



*The building of the CC of the BCP in Sofia attacked and set on fire by a fascist gang on May 24, 1921*

continued the struggle. With the help of the army reinforcements sent from Sofia and Vratsa, the leaders of the coup turned against the peasant insurgent army and defeated them.

In a number of places the communists fought shoulder to shoulder with the agrarians against the perpetrators of the coup till the end of the uprising. The overthrown Prime Minister Alexander Stamboliiski, whom the coup of June 9, 1923 found in his native viliage of Slavovitsa, organized several thousand insurrectionists from the region and advanced against the town of Pazardjik. Armed with guns and pistols, the insurrectionists proved helpless when faced with the machine gun and artillery fire of the enemy. They were routed, Stamboliiski was taken prisoner and murdered after the most cruel tortures on June 14, 1923.

The days of the armed resistance against the June 9 coup were the most favourable period for the setting up of a revolutionary worker-peasant alliance, of communist-agrarian unity in blocking the way to fascism. The erroneous neutral policy of the Central Committee of the BCP, however, was one of the main reasons for missing this moment. It deprived the people's masses, who had risen in arms, from

the leadership of a political power, which could have organized them and led them in a successful battle against the fascist coup. That is why the defeat of the working people, who had risen in arms to defend the lawful government of the Bulgarian Agrarian Party, was at the same time a defeat of the BCP. In fact, the Party proved defeated without fighting. Incorrectly characterizing the coup as a shift from one bourgeois, oppressive regime to another,and remaining neutral to it, the BCP did not identify the main enemy – fascism, and did not direct its blow against it. It did not recognize the Bulgarian Agrarian Party as its ally, rejected unity of action with it and did not make use of its reserves for a victory over the common enemy. In this way, the neutrality of the BCP in the June 9 coup facilitated the establishment of a fascist dictatorship.

The mistake of the CC of the BCP was criticized by the Executive Committee of the Communist International (ECCI) and by a number of town and village party locals. Their criticism grew constantly. The opponents of neutrality took the upper hand in the CC of the BCP. In its sessions during August 5-7, 1923, a policy of all-round preparation for a mass armed uprising aimed at the establishment of a worker-peasant government was approved. The Party's urgent tasks were mapped out: to build up a united front of the workers, peasants and urban working people; to mobilize the majority of the people in a struggle against terrorism and the onslaught of capitalism; to work out a military plan for the moblization and the uprising of the masses; to step up underground anti-fascist work in the army, etc. This resolution of the CC of the BCP was an example of how mistakes could be overcome, an example of revolutionary resolve and the correct application of the united front tactics.

Georgi Dimitrov elucidated the new concept of the BCP on the united front. For this purpose, on the order of the Party's Central Committee, he published a series of articles in the *Rabotnicheski Vestnik* (Workers Gazette), the organ of the Party, which was not closed down by the authorities until the September 1923 Uprising. Dimitrov pointed out that bourgeois reaction in Bulgaria, as in other countries, resorted to an extreme means – fascism, to implement its political aims. As a complete rejection of any democracy and all democratic rights and freedoms of the popular masses, fascism was directed not only against the communist movement, but also against all democratic organizations, against the entire working people. The political situation in Italy and in Bulgaria left no doubt that fascism was the greatest danger for all working people and for their countries. The united front of labour was a vital necessity to the joint self defence of all 'from workers, peasants, craftsmen, petty merchants, clerks and employees, to doctors, lawyers,

*Alexander Stamboliiski (1879-1923), leader of the Bulgarian Agrarian Party and Prime Minister*

engineers, professors, officers from the reserve and even generals, living by their own labour' against the common enemy.

In his articles Dimitrov exposed both the opponents of the united front, who provoked fear of it, pronouncing it a 'clever move' of the BCP, and those apologists of class collaborations who, with the intention to speculate with it, declared that the suggestion of the BCP for a united front, confirmed the correctness of their own tactics. 'The united front and class collaboration,' Georgi Dimitrov explained'....are two deeply opposed tactics, entirely incompatible and mutually exclusive' (V. 7, p. 223, Bulgarian edition).

The organizational and military technical preparation for the uprising ran parallel with political preparation (in which Dimitrov's articles played an important role). The CC of the BCP reached an agreement with the leadership of the BAP on the building of a united front and was doing much to attract other anti-fascist organizations and individuals to it.

*Leaders of the September 1923 Uprising*

*Vassil Kolarov*

*Georgi Dimitrov*

On September 12, 1923, the fascist authorities began the mass arrests of communists and searched the party clubs, banned the publication of *Rabotnicheski Vestnik*, and outlawed the Bulgarian Communist Party. This had an adverse effect on the preparation of the uprising but did not paralyze the forces and combat ability of the Party. The uprising broke out (although not simultaneously) in various regions of the country. In North-western Bulgaria it lasted longest and the participants were most numerous. Here the form and functions of the worker-peasant revolutionary government took shape most clearly as, for the first time in the country's history, such government was established by the rising people. Organized under the leadership of the BCP in alliance with the BAP, the September 1923 Uprising had primarily democratic goals: the disarmament and rendering harmless of the enemy forces, the arming of the workers and peasants, the setting up of a people's army the consolidation of the worker-peasant alliance (by means of a



decisive agrarian reform for the benefit of small landholders and landless peasants and through undertakings providing benefits to the peasants and the other working people), the establishment of control over industrial production and trade, measures aimed at wresting the power from the capitalists and the abolition of the monarchy and similar measures. The worker-peasant government established strict legality and order, ensured the life and property of all citizens, including those who were deposed from power, was humane and benevolent towards the prisoners taken in combat and gave medical aid to the wounded enemies in the same way as it did to the wounded insurgents.

The correct political line, which the BCP provided for the uprising and which outlined the objective possibility of its victory, was undermined by the mistakes in the military strategy and tactics. The fact that the uprising did not break out in the different regions simultaneously, the lack of coordination in the actions of its forces, the lack of partisan movement in the rear of the enemy, the insufficient efforts to revolutionize the mass of the soldiers who remained obedient (with very few exceptions) to the fascist command and a number of other mistakes led to the failure of the uprising first in separate places, and later in entire regions and districts. The combination of individual defeats had a decisive importance for the fate of the uprising as a whole. The enemy put it down with fire and blood. Its class revenge was boundless. Anti-fascists were murdered for their convictions alone without any questioning or trial including those who had not even taken part in the uprising because of illness, detention or imprisonment before its outbreak, etc. Executions were performed before the eyes of relatives and the latter were forced to spit on the corpses of the insurgents. Women, girls, children and old people were tortured and maltreated – this was the response of the fascists to the idealism, magnanimity, humaneness and heroism demonstrated by the insurgents.

The September 1923 Uprising, the first anti-fascist uprising in the world to be organized and led by a communist party, in spite of its suppression, played a stupendous historical role. It shook the entire socio-political system of bourgeois Bulgaria, took the democratic mask off the fascist dictatorship and caused irreversible changes in social awareness, cultural life and popular psychology. The uprising opened a blood-filled gap between the people and fascism. It became a turning point in the process of the transformation of the BCP into a Leninist party.

The united front policies of the BCP and the left wing of the BAP were pursued even more consistently after the uprising. It was the chief political form of the anti-fascist struggle, which was becoming increa-

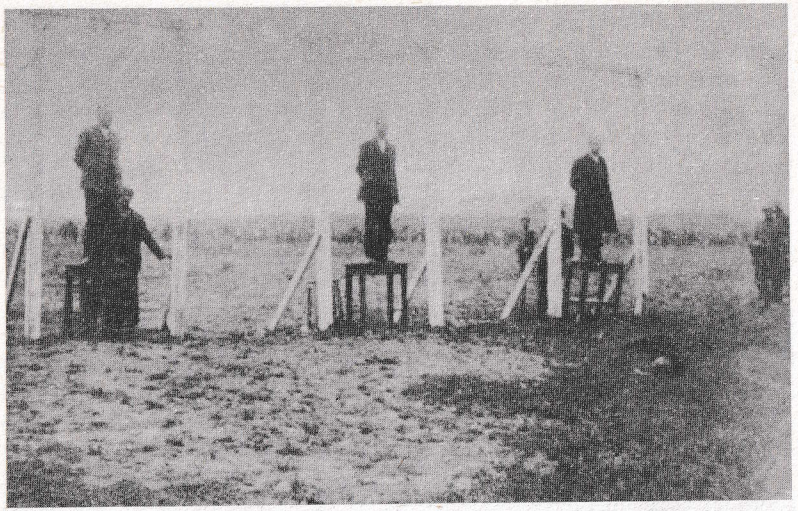
*Participants in the September 1923 Uprising from Pazardjik district sentenced to death.*

*Victims of the fascist atrocities in suppressing the September 1923 Uprising in Stara Zagora*

*Mityo Ganev's detachment, 1925*

*T. Groudov's detachment, 1924-1925*

*I. Kiskinov's detachment, 1924-1925*



*Executions*

singly popular among the working people. The economic (mainly strikes) and ideological forms of struggle (mainly legal and underground propaganda and agitation) were used parallel to it. In the 1924-1925 period several communist partisan units (detachments) were organized to counteract the fascist terror. Persecuted anti-fascists found refuge in them. They dealt the enemy counterblows through daring attacks. However, the situation was not favourable for the deployment of a partisan movement. Under the conditions of temporary stabilization of capitalism and with the assistance rendered by world reaction to the Bulgarian fascism, its positions grew stronger. The partisan movement was doomed to failure. It was headed by communists who did not understand Lenin's instruction that'... the party of the proletariat can never consider partisan warfare as the only or even main means of struggle.' (Works, v. 11, p. 213, 214.)

The failure of the partisan movement of the 1924-1925 period did not shake the confidence of the working people in the BCP, or in its united front policy. Although not conforming to the real conditions and not answering their requirements, in spite of the numerous casualties, the partisan struggle played its role in developing revolutionary qualities and traditions in the Bulgarian anti-fascists.

Georgi Dimitrov, the activist of the BCP and of the international

*Georgi Dimitrov delivering his concluding speech at the Reichstag Fire Trial in 1933*

workers movement, deserves the greatest credit for transforming the drive to organize a united labour front into the main content of the Bulgarian people's anti-fascist resistance. Dimitrov always linked the success of the anti-fascist struggle with the setting up of a united front based on a sound worker-peasant alliance. At the historic Reichstag Fire Trial, while dealing the first moral blow to fascism, Dimitrov again underscored the idea of a united front and its importance: 'Mass work, mass struggle, mass resistance, united front, no adventures!' (V.9,p.269.)

At the time of the Reichstag Fire Trial the anti-fascist struggle in Bulgaria entered a new stage of expansion and strengthening. Along with the forms used so far, electoral struggle and strikes, demonstrations, protests, delegations, printed and oral propaganda and agitation in unmasking the anti-popular essence of the fascist dictatorship, against the preparation by the international imperialist reaction of a war against the Soviet Union, in defence of peace and in popularizing socialist construction in the USSR, new forms of struggle and organization were used: the movement in defence of the defendants of the Reichstag Fire Trial, for their release from the nazi prisons, work in the credit, consumer and other cooperatives, in setting up consumer organizations for the cooperative cultivation of the land, the formation and activity of Bulgaro-Soviet friendship societies, and in many other ways. Proceeding from this basis the BCP, the leading force of the united front, started to implement the decisions of the Seventh Congress of the Communist International (1935) at which the Marxist-Leninist theses on the united front tactics were summed up and further elaborated.

## THE PERIOD OF THE POPULAR FRONT IN THE STRUGGLE AGAINST FASCISM AND THE WAR

Georgi Dimitrov delivered the main report at the Seventh Congress of the Comintern. He defined the nature of fascism and the vital necessity of directing the united efforts of the workers and of all other working and democratic strata, against it. Dimitrov elucidated the problems of the united proletarian front, the popular anti-fascist front and the anti-imperialist front. He pointed out that according to the ratio of the class and political forces, any Popular Front government set up after a victory over fascism in one country or another, could prove one of the

most important transitional forms to the broadest and fullest democracy – the socialist democracy (V.10, p.108).

After this congress the BCP became still more closely involved in the struggle of the working people for political freedom and democratic rights. It started resolute activity against the attempts of monarcho-fascism to set up state controlled trade unions. The BCP popularized and supported the proposal of the Comintern to the Second International for a joint struggle against the aggression of fascist Italy in Ethiopia. The CC of the BCP, in a document addressed to the party organizations, members and sympathizers, laid down the Party's basic task: to build up a popular front. At its plenum in 1936 the CC of the BCP elaborated the platform of the popular front. It raised demands for: an immediate restoration of the Constitution and the rights and freedoms provided in it: fixing a day for the election of the National Assembly in conformity with the electoral laws prior to 1923; the abrogation of the anti-Constitutional orders and laws brought into force after May 19, 1934 and the disbanding of the organizations, which abolished the Constitution or opposed its restoration.

The BCP, the leading force in the struggle for a popular front against fascism and the dangers of war, reformed the Workers Party, i.e. its legal form existing from 1927 to 1934. Although the Workers Party was now also underground, it could more easily become a mass party, it could enhance and strengthen the connection of the BCP with the working people. The opportunities for setting up a popular front were broadened after the restoration of the Workers Party and the deployment of its activity. The revolutionary trade unions, which worked underground, headed by the BCP, boycotted the creation of the state Bulgarian Workers Union (BWU). However, when the majority of the working people were forced to become members of the BWU, the members of the revolutionary trade unions joined also and rallied around themselves the members of the BWU. The communists worked in conjunction with the social democrats, agrarians and the anti-fascists without party affiliation, rejected the local leaders chosen by the authorities and almost always elected united front militants instead.

Through the mass organizations, the communists convened general meetings, which adopted resolutions on such problems as: the water supply and sewage systems, the building of roads and schools, etc., elected delegations to present their demands to the authorities. The so-called delegation movement was launched which was better organized, assumed mass proportions and purposefulness with the help of the BCP.

The BCP was educating thousands of militants of the Popular Front



against fascism and the war and led the workers' strikes, protest movements of the peasant masses, the educational and political activities of the mass cultural organizations.

The BCP came to an agreement for united front cooperation first with the left wing of the Bulgarian Agrarian Party and then with the Social Democratic Party. The Workers Party and the opposition bloc of five former non-fascist parties, called The Five, engaged in united actions in the building up of constitutional committees and in jointly participating in the municipal elections to be held in 1937 and the parliamentary elections planned for 1938. Three wings of other former parties outside the Five joined in. Through the constitutional committees the Popular Front emerged both in the municipal and in the parliamentary elections as a powerful political force. The greatest activity among the people's masses was aroused in connection with the elections for a National Assembly (1938) in which the Workers Party presented common lists of nominees with the other non-fascist parties (tacitly acting as such).

The Popular Front won the wide support of the masses in the elections. Its political centre was the Six, so called as it now included representatives of the Workers Party, of the Social Democratic Party, the left and right wings of the Bulgarian Agrarian Party, of the Radical Party and of the Democratic Party. Other political figures joined the Six. The organizations of the Bulgarian emigrants from Macedonia, Thrace and Dobrudja, the republicans of the Military League and of the Zveno political circle, who had moved to the left and who had lost the good will of the monarch during the confrontation with fascism, also got in touch with it.

The Popular Front scored major successes in the struggle for peace, in defence of the Spanish Republic (where more than 460 volunteers went to fight against the fascist mutineers and the German and Italian fascists who supported them).

The BCP implemented its guiding role in the Popular Front movement mainly via the Workers Party. The question of merging the two underground Marxist-Leninist Parties into one became a pressing issue with the growth and consolidation of the Workers Party. In 1938 the CC of the BCP took a decision to transform the two parties into one bearing the name Bulgarian Workers Party (BWP). The transformation was finally completed in 1940.

On the eve of the Second World War the necessity of unity in the Popular Front ranks grew. Precisely at that time most of the bourgeois party leaders in Bulgaria deserted from it. Their conduct was influenced by the Munich agreement between Britain and France, on the one side,

*Bulgarian volunteers among the defenders of the Spanish Republic, 1938*

and Germany and Italy, on the other, concluded on September 29, 1938, by virtue of which Hitler's fascists were given the 'right' to seize Czechoslovak territories. The ulterior motive of the agreement, i.e. to direct the fascist aggression only against the East, mainly against the Soviet Union, as well as the overt anti-Sovietism of the western countries, influenced the leadership of the bourgeois non-fascist parties in Bulgaria in their decision to give up their wavering and inconsistent participation in the Popular Front movement and to desert it altogether, and start collaborating with and giving support to monarcho-fascism. The extreme right wing groups and functionaries of the Agrarian Party also left the Popular Front.

In this situation the Bulgarian Workers Party continued to rally the working people in an anti-fascist front for the building of a peaceful bloc of the Balkan countries, which could rely on the support of the Soviet Union in their resistance to the fascist aggression. A wide strata of the people remained on anti-fascist, Popular Front positions after the retreat of the pro-western politicians, and continued the struggle for peace and for Bulgaro-Soviet friendship under the leadership of the Bulgarian Workers Party.

The Bulgarian working people and students expressed their indignation and protest against the nazi occupation of Czechoslovakia by



mass demonstrations, rallies and other events, at which there were clashes with the fascist police and mass arrests were made.

Hard trials began for the Bulgarian and the other peoples suffering under and fighting against fascism with the outbreak of the Second World War. Although there were opportunities of turning the world conflict into a progressive, just, liberating war of the peoples against fascism, in the initial period the imperialists dominated the course of development of the world conflict. This was due to the efforts of the world monopolies to find a solution of the contradictions existing between them, at the expense of the USSR and to the endeavour of the western states to bring back their lost ally – the nazi Reich, and to pit it against the Soviet Union. The Munich policy of imperialist agreement with nazi fascism was still pursued by the western countries. Britain and France avoided serious battles and waged the so-called 'phoney war'. They incited the Finnish government to start a war against the USSR and at the same time French troops in Syria and the British Airforce in the Middle East were being prepared for an attack against the Soviet Union from the South.

In Bulgaria the admirers of western democracy not only left the Popular Front, but passed over to an increasingly overt opposition to it from an anti-Soviet standpoint, in spite of the ever closer and dangerous association of Bulgaria with the nazi Reich. The united front of the working people still continued to be the major force in the people's anti-fascist struggle. Although its social basis was limited, its political activity and influence grew. In the elections held for the National Assembly (Dec. 1939 – Jan. 1940) more than 600,000 votes were cast for the candidates of the Popular Front. In spite of the terror, restrictions and forgeries in the counting of the votes, etc., it became apparent that 28 per cent of the electorate most resolutely supported the Popular Front struggle, waged by the Bulgarian Workers Party with the motto: 'Peace and neutrality', and under the main slogan – 'Friendship and a mutual assistance pact with the USSR'.

Strikes were used with great success in the struggle against the anti-popular policy of monarcho-fascism and in defence of the economic interests of the hired workers. Organized by the Bulgarian Workers Party in June 1940, they made the authorities (which had earlier passed a law on civil mobilization) raise the workers' wages by 10 to 15 per cent, in order to prevent the strikes from becoming general. Thus a moral and material victory over monarcho-fascism was scored.

After the capitulation of France (June 1940) the nazi aggression was directed at the Balkans. In deploying the struggle for 'peace and neutrality' and 'friendship and a mutual assistance pact with the USSR',

the BWP strove to also draw into the Popular Front movement the national bourgeois circles which were opposed to Germany. 'The European countries conquered by imperialist Germany are subjected to *hard national and social oppression'*, the BWP pointed out in its printed organ *(Rabotnichesko Delo* newspaper, No 8, July 1940) and gave the warning: The nazi military detachments stationed in Bulgaria under the guise of 'tourists, geological prospectors, 'meteorological' and other groups, were 'the *German military mainstay inside the country,* the task of which is to support the anti-popular fascist regime and *to place Bulgaria entirely in the service of the Rome-Berlin axis.'* In conclusion the BWP stated that it would continue to rally 'the widest strata of the masses of the people and all honest and sincere fighters for peace and neutrality, and the freedom and independence of the country, no matter to which political camp they belong. Thus a *broad popular front of the working people* will be built, which alone can lead the country to salvation in our extremely dangerous times.

The slogans of the BWP for the struggle against nazi fascism as the chief danger threatening Bulgaria, were interpreted by the British radio stations as early as the summer of 1940 in highly prejudiced manner. According to them the Soviet Union had informed the CC of the BWP through Georgi Dimitrov, the leader of the Comintern, that it allegedly intended to break the non-aggression pact with Germany. The aim of the British radio stations was to breed intrigue and doubt about the peaceful policy of the USSR and to divert the German Wehrmacht to the East and, above all, against the Soviet Union. With the same aim the Bulgarian Anglophiles, who acted more like anti-communists, than like enemies of the nazi aggression, sought closer contacts with representatives of the BWP. Avoiding anything which could foster an anti-Soviet and anti-communist provocation such as the one mentioned above, the BWP continued to direct the Popular Front struggle against Hitler's fascism.

The Bulgarian-Romanian treaty, signed in Craiova on September 7, 1940 on the return of South Dobrudja to Bulgaria, was used by the Bulgarian monarcho-fascists to deceive the people that their policy had won the support of Hitler and Mussolini for the correct and peaceful settlement of the Dobrudja question. The BWP unmasked their deceptions and demagogy. It pointed out the undoubted merit of the USSR and warned the people that the monarcho-fascists were associating Bulgaria with Germany in order to undertake 'new military adventures in the interest of forces, which have repeatedly thrown our country into national catastrophes.

In October 1940, nazi forces were stationed in Hungary and Roma-



nia. The Italian fascist invasion of Greece followed on October 28. In the fateful days for Bulgaria, the BWP succeeded in rousing a nation-wide movement in favour of the conclu ion of a Bulgaro-Soviet pact for the defence of peace and the country's independence.

The movement reached its climax at the end of November 1940 (i.e. immediately after the *Soviet government officially offered Bulgaria a friendship and mutual assistance pact on November 25).* The Bulgarian government tried to conceal the Soviet proposal from the people, but the BWP spread the news all over the country. The people were resolutely in favour of its acceptance. Telegrams and statements, containing signatures and demanding the conclusion of a pact with the USSR, were sent from all towns and villages and from industrial enterprises and associations, meetings and sessions. This was a kind of a plebiscite on the rejection of the fascist policy of associating with German-Italian aggression and for adopting a policy of the guaranteed peace, neutrality and independence of Bulgaria through friendship and mutual assistance with the Soviet Union.

The government rejected the demand of the people, but was afraid to immediately join the fascist bloc and to openly station fascist troops in Bulgaria, as Berlin demanded. It was forced to postpone its national treason with three months, in the course of which it made a shift in the balance of power to its advantage. On March 1, 1941 a treaty joining Bulgaria to the fascist bloc was signed in Vienna. On the same day the nazis finally and openly turned Bulgaria into a supply and military base.

The BWP exposed the pro-nazi defeatist policy of the Bulgarian government. The Party gave wide publicity to the statement of TASS that the USSR had not been informed of, and had not given its agreement to the stationing of foreign troops in Bulgaria. In this way the attempts of the monarcho-fascists to deceive the masses of the people that Bulgaria had joined the axis with the agreement of the USSR were foiled. The CC of the BWP published a statement in *Rabotnichesko Delo* and also distributed a separate leaflet, in which it resolutely condemned the national treason of monarcho-fascism.

The consistent struggle waged by the BWP against fascism, the war and the policy of the Bulgarian government resulted in the numerous hostile actions of the people's masses against the nazi troops. Workers in Sofia, Plovdiv and other towns went on strike. The peasants and other working people openly expressed their indignation. The transportation of the nazis was sabotaged. Slogans appeared on walls and buildings: 'The Germans – out of Bulgaria!'. 'Down with the German agents in the government!', 'Down with fascist Germany!'. 'Down

with Hitler!', 'Out with the nazi gangs!', 'Long live free Bulgaria!', and the like.

The BWP tirelessly exposed the attempts of monarcho-fascism to stifle the popular resistance with police repression, arrests, imprisonment and concentration camps, set up after the nazi pattern, with the stirring up of anti-semitism and the organization of anti-Jewish pogroms, with the setting up of the *Brannik* (Defender) state youth fascist organization after the model of Hitlerjugend, and similar measures. The struggle of the BWP against the anti-popular policy of the government and the nazi aggression was a considerable contribution to foiling the attempts to prepare Bulgaria for participation in a war against the Balkan peoples. The Party published the most important items of the declaration adopted jointly by the Central Committee of the Yugoslav Communist Party and the CC of the BWP prior to the nazi war in the Balkans. The topicality of the slogans raised by the YCP and the BWP in the new situation was referred to, particularly the slogans in which the declaration ended: 'Down with the imperialist war! Long live the fraternity and agreement between the Bulgarian, Yugoslav and all Balkan peoples! Long live the Soviet Union, fighter for peace and defender of the small nations!'

The CC of the BWP issued a leaflet in the first hours of the nazi invasion of Yugoslavia and Greece. In it the new fascist aggression and the collaboration of the Bulgarian rulers in its preparation was condemned and the Bulgarian people were called upon to fight resolutely against their involvement in a fratricidal war and for peace, fraternal agreement and cooperation with the neighbouring nations.

Another Party appeal was made with the leaflet issued by the CC of the BWP on April 6, 1941 entitled 'Against the Fratricidal War'. The publication and wide distribution of these leaflets was only a small part of the varied struggle waged by the Party against the nazi invasion of Yugoslavia and Greece. One of the enemy documents read in part: ' The BWP protested against the German invasion of Yugoslavia and Greece and declared itself against both the fragmentation of Yugoslavia and the growing economic, military and cultural collaboration between Bulgaria and Germany, considering it a move that would only bring disaster to the country and the people.'

The apprehension of the monarcho-fascists that the popular masses would react to the aggression against Yugoslavia and Greece, condemned by the BWP, was one of the reasons why Bulgarian troops did not take part in the Germano-fascist war in the Balkans in April 1941. The Bulgarian rulers were forced to assist the Wehrmacht in other ways, but not with their participation in military operations.



The BWP organized numerous successful activities by Bulgarian working people in helping and liberating Yugoslav and Greek prisoners of war from the rear troops of the nazis, stationed on Bulgarian territory. The Party continued to address still more insistent appeals to the Bulgarian people for an anti-fascist solidarity with the neighbouring nations, in the resolute struggle against imperialist subordination and the fanning of hostilities among the Balkan peoples, against their disunification, their being pitted one against the other and their mutual weakening in the face of their common enemy and oppressor.

The struggle against the despotic 'new order' established by the fascist bloc after the conquering of Yugoslavia and Greece was the most characteristic feature of the activity of the BWP in the spring of 1941. The BWP explained to the people that the self determination of the Balkan nations could only be achieved through a victory of the progressive forces, whereby the nazi 'new order' would be abolished and the way would be paved for a free existence, democratic development and a correct solution to the national problem in the Balkans. The Party was irreconcilable to the terror perpetrated against the population of the regions, where Bulgarian troops were also stationed.

The BWP unfolded a consistent struggle for the fraternal cooperation of the Bulgarian and neighbouring nations, for rallying the national forces against the pro-German policy of the monarcho-fascism and for national independence, peace and friendship with the Soviet Union. In this direction the BWP would have achieved much greater results, if a number of non-fascist circles among the bourgeoisie had taken a stand beneficent of the entire people, and not only to their limited position characterized by their anti-communism and anti-Sovietism. The most prominent representatives of the bourgeois democracy did not accept the cooperation offered them by the BWP . Their anti-communism, coupled with the deceptions among part of the petty bourgeoisie as regards the war of the fascist axis and the policy of the Bulgarian government, raised serious obstacles for the BWP in deploying the anti-fascist movement and rallying the national forces in a united front to counteract the German oppression.

In spite of these difficulties the BWP succeeded in organizing a sweeping anti-fascist movement, which encompassed also the mass of the soldiers to whom the activists of the BWP explained the necessity of launching a struggle against Bulgarian and German fascism under the banner of the Popular Front.. In many army units, particularly in the border regions, a passive resistance against the officers' commands began, which gradually grew into acts of insubordination and the raising of slogans for the demobilization of the recruits from the reserves.

The intensification of the anti-fascist resistance in all its forms, taking place in Bulgaria, although the country was not subjugated by means of a war, was due to the high internationalist consciousness manifested by the communist vanguard of the working people.

Bulgaria's 'alliance' with Germany was considered by the BWP as a practical abolition of the country's national sovereignty, and made the Bulgarian monarcho-fascism an accomplice in the imperialist policy of German monopoly capital. This 'alliance' brought forth new changes amidst the contradictions acting in Bulgarian society. By that time the main contradiction was between fascism and the people. It remained so also after the official announcement of the 'alliance' with Germany. However, now that Bulgarian fascism was acting as a vehicle of the nazi domination, of foreign oppression and dependence, joreign fascism and its policy assumed a primary role in the concrete situation. It infringed upon not only the proletariat, the petty bourgeoisie, their political forces and the circles of the non-fascist bourgeois opposition, but also upon all other class and political forces and elements interested in Bulgaria's state sovereignty, national freedom and independence. The contradiction between fascism and the people was already manifest as a contradiction between the vehicles of the pro-German policy, on the one hand, and the forces upholding national independence and state sovereignty, on the other. This contradiction and its development made its imprint on the manifestation of the other contradictions.

The building of a national front for the struggle against nazism and Bulgarian monarcho-fascism, for winning independence and its guarantees by means of a friendship and mutual aid pact with the Soviet Union, for unity and solidarity with the neighbouring nations, were the main task facing the Bulgarian people. And this task was being persistently and unflinchingly implemented by the BWP. Thus the Party played a decisive role in the deployment of the anti-fascist struggle in Bulgaria in the initial period of the Second World War. Thanks to the leadership of the BWP the anti-fascist resistance passed over to new forms of organization and struggle, corresponding to the transformation of the war, waged by the enemies of the fascist axis into a just, liberating, progressive war. Till struggle, letion of this process the anti-fascist front in Bulgaria deployed its struggle in the most expedient manner – by peaceful forms, i.e. through the mass and active struggle of the proletarian and non-proletarian strata of the working people, under the banner of the Popular Front and based on extensive national foundations.

# NATIONAL LIBERATION PERIOD

The nazi invasion of the USSR and the beginning of the Great Patriotic War of the Soviet Union, which stood at the head of the peoples and states fighting against fascism, brought about a fundamental change in the international situation.

This was the climax in the transformation of the war against the fascist bloc into a just, people's liberation, progressive war.

The aims of the fascist forces, who hid behind the demagogical declarations that they waged a struggle against the imperialist Versailles system were exposed. Their barbarity, treachery and ambition to become rulers of the world, by drowning mankind in blood, aroused the indignation of the majority of the people in Bulgaria. The truth reached the minds and hearts of many of the working people, who were in the majority anti-fascist-minded. The USSR had a strong impact on them by its international policy which coincided with their national interests and leanings. That is why the majority of the Bulgarian people considered the nazi aggression against the USSR as a crime and a threat to their own present and future.

The CC of the BWP immediately expressed the indignation of the Bulgarian people at the perfidious nazi aggression against the Soviet Union. On June 22, 1941, the CC issued a leaflet in which it appealed to the people to wage an irreconcilable struggle against the German oppressors and for freedom, people's rule, international solidarity and friendship with the Soviet Union.

In the leaflet of June 22, the Party leadership pointed out that the Bulgarian people who were connected to the Soviet people by their fraternal feelings, were faced with the historic task *'not to allow by any means the use of their land and their army* for the piratical ends of German fascism. They are faced with the task of *helping,* to the best of their abilities, the Soviet people in their hard struggle.'

The Party assessment that a life-and-death struggle was being waged between fascism and freedom-loving peoples, was shared both by the communists and the working class, and the vast majority of the other working people in Bulgaria.

On June 24, 1941 the CC of the BCP decided to organize and launch the people's armed liberation struggle. A Central Military Commission was set up at the Party's CC for implementing this policy and military commissions were set up at the district committees of the BWP. The partisan movement was to be the basic form of the armed struggle (actions of detachments outside inhabited localities and of com-

bat groups in them). Measures were taken to step up the underground activities in the army in order to revolutionize the masses of the soldiers. Efforts were made to build up a militant alliance of all anti-fascist, democratic and patriotic forces.

According to the estimation of the Police Headquarters, the activity of the BWP in 1941 reached its climax as early as '... in the months of August and September, and was spreading among all social strata, particularly in the villages.'

The BWP considered the struggle against foreign dependence and the monarcho-fascist dictatorship as a national task No 1. The success of the struggle for democracy, as well as the struggle for socialism depended on its solution, which was not within the abilities of only one class, and still less so of only one organization or party. At the same time the CC of the BWP pointed out that without the rout of nazism, the fascist dictatorship and the German domination could not be overthrown. Subordinating the struggle for socialism to the struggle for national independence and democracy and linking it inseparably with the internationalist task facing the peoples fighting against fascism, the BWP acted in accordance with the main processes in the internal and international situation. By virtue of these processes the struggle for socialism became a component of the Bulgarian people's national task, and its solution turned, for its part, into a component of the international struggle of the united front of peoples fighting against fascism and led by the Soviet Union.

The policy of the BWP was in conformity with the requirements of the Leninist strategy and tactics of the proletariat and the other working people against national and social oppression.

This policy of the BWP was deeply national in character. It led the Bulgarian people to a victory over monarcho-fascism and its foreign supporters.

By this policy the non-proletarian forces could gain the upper hand in the anti-fascist struggle (if they took part en masse and consistently). This, however, did not sidetrack the BWP from its ultimate goal and did not move the Bulgarian proletariat away from the fulfilment of its historic task. Even in case of a non-proletarian supremacy in the anti-fascist struggle its success led to the abolition of the monarcho-fascist dictatorship and of the foreign dependence on nazism, to the establishment of a people's democratic rule and to guaranteeing the political rights and freedoms of the people. No further struggle for a broad and consistent democracy, the socialist democracy, was possible without achieving all that.

The communists (members and sympathizers of the BWP) were



representatives of the revolutionary trend in the anti-fascist resistance (which aimed at depriving not only the fascist bourgeoisie but the entire capitalist class of power). They were fighting to eject the nazis from Bulgaria, to overthrow the monarcho-fascist regime, to give a new orientation to the anti-nazi coalition and for alliance, friendship and cooperation with the USSR. Generally speaking the adherents of the Bulgarian Agrarian Party, the Social Democratic Party, the Zveno group, the democrats, radicals and independent non-fascist politicians, were representing the non-revolutionary part of the anti-fascist resistance. Their actions lacked resolve but they were primarily legitimate, aimed at Bulgaria's breaking away from the fascist bloc and its reorientation to the anti-nazi coalition with the intention of avoiding the catastrophic political and social consequences for capitalism of the pro-German policy of the ruling fascist bourgeoisie.

The unity of action among the various class and social strata and among their underground political parties, the BWP , the BAP, the Social Democratic Party, the Democratic Party, the Zveno Republican Group, the Radical Party and others, all of them opposing fascism, was necessary for the success of the anti-fascist struggle.

The BWP, the best organized political party, was most deeply aware of this.

After June 22, 1941 the BWP had a membership of about 10,000 consciously disciplined and active people and numerous sympathizers among the majority of the people. Besides the leadership of the BWP (inside the country – the Central Committee and the Politburo, and abroad – the Foreign Bureau), in the party districts 17 district committees were active with several regional committees in each district (there were a total of more than 60 regional committees in the country) and hundreds of small party organizations in the towns, villages and factories. The Workers Youth League (WYL) was a great help to the BWP in its political activities (with its department with the higher establishments of learning, called BONSS – Bulgarian National Students Union – and the Marxist-Leninist groups in the high schools). For the size of the country the BWP was a first class anti-fascist opposition force with its sound underground organization, iron discipline and incomparable activity and influence among the people.

The BAP exerted extensive influence among the peasant strata, particularly those owning small amounts of land. However, its organizational situation was not too good. The leaders and activists of the BAP were disunited. They were active in two wings of the BAP – the left and right wing. Some agrarians went over to extreme right-wing positions and to overt collaboration with the government and fascism.

Generally speaking the adherents and sympathizers of the BAP upheld their democratic and anti-fascist views. Both wings of the BAP did not set up their underground locals. The leaders and activists of the right wing pursued a policy of restoration of the democratic government, not so much by mass anti-fascist struggle as through collaboration with the monarchy and through the political machinations of the bourgeois party leaders. That is why they were losing the confidence of the peasants.

The left wing of the BAP pursued a more consistent anti-fascist policy and in that way it constantly extended its influence among the peasants.

Neither wing of the Bulgarian Agrarian Party had a legal printed outlet, or a regular organizational life and normally operating locals. However, they kept up an apparatus of their own channels of communication between the leaders and their supporters. They used their positions in the mass organizations: agricultural cooperatives, consumer cooperatives, etc., for political action. They also had representatives in the National Assembly and contributed to the progressive publications.

The Social Democratic Party was in a bad organizational state, as left and right wings were taking shape, with widely differing political orientations, for and against unity of action with the BWP, for and against friendship with the USSR. The Democratic Party was in yet more sorry state, because it existed only ideologically and not organizationally.

The Zveno Republican Group was in a better organizational state. Having developed a left-wing ideology, Zveno adopted a resolute stand of friendship with the USSR. Although its public support was negligible, its connections with the command officers of the army and the personal prestige of its leaders constantly enhanced its importance in the left-wing of the non-fascist front.

The Radical Party existed only ideologically, but not organizationally. Its oppositional self manifestation was gradually weakening.

The representatives of the former National Party undertook a more active oppositional activity using their personal connections, social position and prestige.

The BWP made continuous efforts to establish contacts and mutual action with all parties and functionaries, who were against nazi fascism and, above all, with the activists and sympathizers of the left wing of the Bulgarian Agrarian Party. In their leaflets of July, October and December, 1941, they condemned the nazi aggression against the USSR and expressed solidarity with the Soviet people and faith in their victory. The left wing agrarians conducted extensive oral propaganda



against Bulgaria's participation in the nazi war, and for breaking the alliance with Germany and linking Bulgaria with the anti-nazi coalition. They particularly condemned the war declared on the US and Britain by the Bulgarian government and they exposed the government's policy of depriving from their rights, starving and exposing the people to terror.

The left wing of the Bulgarian Agrarian Party called upon the peasants not to carry out the undertakings of the government and to hide their food, and advised the workers to sabotage production. It demanded the resignation of the government and the establishment of a government of 'the country's unification and salvation'.

In their documents the left wing agrarians were silent as regards the armed struggle: they neither renounced, nor approved of it. Their leadership made oral statements that an armed struggle would cause many casualties, without giving results. In many places, however, the agrarians took a positive stand with regard to the armed struggle, became helpers, and hid the first partisans and members of combat groups.

The activists of the left wing of the BAP who had emigrated to Great Britain, opposed that policy. They settled in London in July 1941 and continued the anti-German propaganda through the Free and Independent Bulgaria radio station. In August 1941, the agrarian emigrants coordinated their policy with the peasant parties in the countries occupied by Germany. At variance with these, however, their group did not set up its armed detachments.

In the beginning of 1942 some of the agrarian emigrants moved to Cairo. There they went on with their activity through the Committee of Free and Independent Bulgaria and the radio station of the same name.The agrarian emigrants who remained in London maintained relations with kindred organizations and with the British leading circles, and through the BBC's programmes in Bulgarian did propaganda work exposing the crimes of the nazis, praising the courage of the Soviet peoples and condemning the war declared by the Bulgarian government on the US and Britain. The sympathies and political preferences of the agrarian emigrants were obviously towards Britain and the US, which, in their opinion, were the main powers of the anti-fascist coalition. The agrarian emigrants kept silent about the anti-communist moves of the Bulgarian government (as, for instance, Bulgaria's joining of the Anti-Comintern Pact). In their radio programmes and with leaflets dropped in Bulgaria by British planes, they raised a slogan about 'a rural Bulgaria' and systematically tried to incite the peasants against the workers.

The leaders and functionaries of the right wing of the BAP did not explicitly express their position on the nazi invasion of the USSR, on the war developments and the ultimate victory. Their political activity was mainly limited within the framework of meetings and talks with representatives of the BAP, of Zveno and other bourgeois opposition members, and in recommending the authorities to change their foreign policy since Germany could not possibly win the war. The leaders of the right wing of the BAP considered that Bulgaria would come to a state, when their wing could establish an independent government. Therefore they avoided unity of action with other political groups.

The anti-fascist position of Zveno strengthened after June 22, 1941. Its functionaries (like General Vladimir Zaïmov) started a sincere unity of action with the BWP and rendered assistance to the international anti-fascist front (and to its main power, the Soviet Union in particular).

The left wing of the Social Democratic Party continued united actions with the BWP and declared its solidarity with the USSR. The right wing, led by Krustyu Pastouhov, had a pro-British orientation. Other social democrats degenerated to an extremely reactionary, pro-German stand.

The successes of the nazi invasion of the USSR in the summer of 1941 parried the opposition policy of the bourgeois non-fascist forces. N. Moushanov, the leader of the Democratic Party, said that the national aspirations were fulfilled by the government's foreign policy and, therefore, Bulgaria had to fulfil its obligations to Germany. Later on, when it became evident that the nazis were meeting insurmountable obstacles on the East Front, N. Moushanov could afford to criticize and protest against the Bulgaria statesmen. Along with the other opposition deputies in the National Assembly, N.Moushanov protested against the decision of the government to declare war on the US and Britain on December 13, 1941, and later, on other occasions.

His criticism,however, sounded,above all,as an appeal aimed at the unification of the right wing non-fascis forces in the struggle against the communist party and in protecting the capitalist system from cataclysms. Moushanov characterized the BWP's anti-fascist activity as 'anti-government and anti-social'. He stated that the National Assembly could not remain indifferent to such an activity 'which could shatter the foundations of the state or be harmful to our relations with the allies.'

With the exception of the left wing of the BAP, of Zveno and the left wing of the Social Democratic Party, the remaining non-fascist forces took a conciliatory stand to the government policy, they were pas-



sive and waited. The efforts of the BWP to achieve political unity with them were fruitless.

The deployment of the anti-fascist struggle was therefore left to the BWP supported by the left wings of the BAP, the Social Democratic Party and Zveno. Besides, the parties cooperating with the BWP took part mainly in the non-violent forms of resistance. Only individual representatives joined the armed struggle.

The strategy of the BWP,the leading force of the Bulgarian people in the anti-fascist struggle, did not change after June 22, 1941. The main enemy, nazi fascism, had not changed, the aim of the main blow against foreign fascism, which was invading also the USSR and against domestic fascism did not change its direction; there were no changes in determining the allies of the proletariat, either (these were all non-fascist, anti-German-minded and patriotic circles of the peasantry, the intelligentsia and the other petty-bourgeois strata), and its reserves (mainly the pro-Western part of the bourgeoisie). By that time the BWP considered it as a reserve but actually the ruling bourgeoisie used it as its reserve because of its anti-communism and anti-Sovietism. In contrast to the unchanged, only further elaborated political strategy, the BWP applied new political tactics, in which new forms of organization and struggle predominated. Without extending and enriching its political tactics the BWP would not have been able to ensure the success of individual clashes with fascism in Bulgaria on the way to winning the ultimate victory over it. Along with its former types of organization: a) underground party and youth committees, organizations and groups in enterprises, offices, towns, villages, districts, barracks, etc.; b) committees and leaderships of the anti-fascist unity in strikes, demonstrations, rallies, campaigns, etc.; c) cooperatives, library clubs, societies and other legal, cultural, mass and professional organizations and unions including the Bulgarian Workers Union , the Party now used new forms of organization (military commissions at the district committees and Central Military Commission at the CC of the BWP,partisan detachments, combat groups, sabotage and diversion units and, after July 17, 1942, the Fatherland Front and its committees). At the same time the Party used some other forms of struggle (underground only) tried and tested primarily by the Bulgarian and international revolutionary movement: actions of the combat groups, of the sabotage and diversion units in the towns and villages, in production and transport; attacks against projects, first outside the inhabited localities and from May 1942 including objects in the inhabited localities by partisan divisions; organized systematic transfer of arms, munitions and other materials from the barracks to the partisans and the combat groups; purposeful

activity of the underground revolutionary units and organizations for the revolutionizing of the majority of the soldiers;temporary occupation of inhabited localities by partisan detachments and military, political, punitive and supply actions in them, combined with mass explanatory work among the population; transmissions by underground radio stations, which along with military and political informations and commentaries, contained explanations of vital problems in the domestic and international situation and the pertinent tasks of the Bulgarian people, the Party directives (in the form of general assessments and conclusions), instructions, admonitions and advice, a steady exchange of experience in the anti-fascist resistance and particularly in the deployment of the armed struggle, through the underground press, through the publication of bulletins, leaflets, slogans, etc., by the partisan and other leaders, through their distribution along Party channels; popularizing the Party radio programmes, etc.

The new forms of organization and struggle, characterizing the BWP's political tactics after June 22, 1941 provided the character of the overall anti-fascist struggle of the Bulgarian people. The armed struggle became its essential content, with its military strategy and tactics, which were subordinated, but did not entirely coincide with the strategy and tactics of the BWP.

The decisions of the CC of the BWP to launch the armed struggle along with some supplementary instruction for their implementation were communicated to the local party leaderships. In dozens of towns and villages combat groups were built up in the summer of 1941 along with party detachments in the regions of the towns Razlog, Gorna Djoumaya (Blagoevgrad), Doupnitsa (Stanké Dimitrov), Pazardjik and Batak. In the autumn of 1941 the Party formed another three detachments; in the regions of the village of Chehlaré, Plovdiv district, of the town of Karlovo and of the village of Voditsa, Varna district, and partisan groups in many other places.

The Foreign Bureau (FB) of the CC of the BWP, headed by Georgi Dimitrov, played a tremendous role in deploying the all-round resistance of the Bulgarian people and particularly in the correct orientation of the armed struggle.With Soviet assistance the Foreign Bureau set up the Hristo Botev radio station and the Naroden Glas (People's Voice) transmitter (which worked on the frequences of the official Bulgarian transmitters, simultaneously with their programmes). The FB helped the partisan movement in Bulgaria by organizing the clandestine return to Bulgaria of political emigrants (more than 50 experienced revolutionaries and militants) in August and September 1941.

In the beginning, the armed forces of the enemy enjoyed a short-



lived superiority over the partisans and the combat groups in Bulgaria. In spite of the inequality, the enemy was forced to acknowledge over 70 partisan actions between the middle and the end of 1941.

The work of the BWP to revolutionize the soldiers was also bearing fruit.According to a statement of the fascist command,the Party had very much stepped up its activity since August 1941'...succeeding in a short period of time to set up underground organizations in all army units.'

The BWP was constantly suffering losses in both the setting up of the military commissions, partisan units, combat groups and underground soldiers' organizations, and in their development operations, as well as during the overall deployment of the anti-fascist resistance: in 1941, 769 communists were arrested, in 1942 – 3,105. Some of them were imprisoned and thrown into concentration camps, others were brutally murdered by the enemy during the questionings, still others were given death sentences and executed.

The following anti-fascists perished in the first year of armed struggel: Anton Ivanov, member of Politburo and Secretary of the CC of the Party; Tsvyatko Radoinov, member of the CC and head of the Central Military Commission (CMC); five associates of the CC of the BWP and the CMC; Vladimir Zaïmov, General of the reserve, representative of the lef wing in Zveno and the Military League and a courageous fighter for Bulgaro-Soviet friendship; plus numerous other anti-fascist leaders, functionaries and activists.

The cherished sacrifices of the BWP, individual defeats and failures of the partisan movement and the collapse of dozens of soldiers' organizations did not lead to a rout of the armed struggle. What is more, they even did not cause an ebb in the general trend of its development. The communists constantly improved their mastery of the skill of fighting and their sympathizers and other anti-fascists learnt with them. The merits of the BWP in this respect were innumerable.

Along with the deployment of the armed struggle the BWP did its best to expand and strengthen the many-sided forms of anti-fascist resistance.

Most prominent were the workers' actions against the high prices, unemployment, dismissals, unpaid labour, bad sanitary conditions, violated rights and interests. The protests addressed to the Bulgarian Workers Union and the court actions against the employers, undertaken by the workers, as well as their delegations, were backed by the craftsmen and other strata. The political demonstrations organized by the BWP, the Workers Youth League and BONSS, along with the opposition of the peasants against the requisitions and other economic, political, etc., measures of the authorities, disturbed the nazi rear in Bulgaria. In

many factories servicing the nazis, production dropped by 40 to 50 per cent. The economic measures of the Bulgarian monarcho-fascists were boycotted en masse by the working people and in their majority remained unimplemented. As a result public opinion of the anti-fascist struggle became increasingly favourable. Other anti-fascists and patriots joined the front rank fighters, the communists.

In spite of the ban on strikes and the heavy punishment, provided for participation in them, the workers still made use of this form of resistance. In July 1941 the workers in the Radio Factory went on strike, and the police arrested 10 instigators. The workers in the Balkan cotton yarn factory in Gabrovo went on strike in October 1941. Its organizers were sentenced to several years of imprisonment. In December of the same year the miners in the village of Srednogortsi, Smolyan region, also went on strike. Similar strikes followed in Zlata mine (Trun region), in Popovo, Pazardjik, Varna, Sofia, Assenovgrad, and elsewhere.

The peasants also offered opposition against fascism. They sabotaged not only the economic measures (requisitions and others) but also the political initiatives of the authorities.

Many peasants disregarded the provisions of the law on civil mobilization. They refused to give up their carts, animals and food and did not pay their taxes. In a number of villages the population rose against the commissions, which went round the houses to measure or search for hidden grain, exposed and condemned the mayors, taxcollectors, the agents and members of the requisition commissions. The strawberry producers left their plantations uncultivated.

The other working people – craftsmen, employees, and intellectuals, supported the workers and peasants in their opposition against fascism, took part in delegations to the commissariats on supplies, in the demands to ensure regular and sufficient bread rations, food-stuffs, clothes, shoes,fuel, instruments, and raw materials for production. The population rendered massive support to those stricken by the terror.

Assisted by the Workers Youth League and BONSS, the Bulgarian Workers Party organized and deployed the anti-fascist struggle in all its forms and demoralized the army as a tool of the fascist dictatorship. In this way the Party paved the way to the growth of the mass resistance, to the involvement in it of ever growing numbers and strata of the people, to the building of a militant alliance of the anti-fascist and patriotic forces against the anti-popular policy of the government and against the nazi oppression in Bulgaria.

# THE SETTING UP OF THE FATHERLAND FRONT

The militant alliance of the anti-fascist forces was necessary in deploying the armed struggle and in preparing the political army of the uprising. The BWP worked tirelessly for the building of this alliance, which was called the Fatherland Front in a number of broadcasts of the Hristo Botev radio station in the autumn of 1941.

The conditions for the setting up of the Fatherland Front came to a head under the influence of the winter counter-offensive of the Soviet Army (1941-1942) and the growing discontent of the working people with the nazi plunders, the deteriorating economic situation, increasing terror and lawlessness, with the war declared in December 1941 on the US and Britain, with the sending of two corps to neigbouring countries (one in Yugoslavia and another in Greece, to replace the nazi occupation troops, withdrawn to be sent to the Eastern Front), with the government policy which was heading to a national catastrophe. Ever wider strata of the people adopted the appeals of the BWP to set up a militant anti-fascist front against the nazi domination and its Bulgarian helpers – the monarcho-fascists.

On the initiative of Georgi Dimitrov the Foreign Bureau of the CC of the BWP worked out the programme of the Fatherland Front and broadcast it over Hristo Botev radio station on July 17, 1942. The Fatherland Front programme contained 12 items. The first five items voiced the following demands: a) not to allow Bulgaria's participation in the nazi war; b) to stop the gendarme service of the Bulgarian troops in the Balkans; c) to break Bulgaria's alliance with Germany and the other countries of the Axis, to eject the nazi troops and Gestapo units from the country; d) to stop the export of food and raw materials to Germany and its allies, to ensure the subsistence of the people; e) to defend the national interests of Bulgaria by means of an agreement with the Balkan nations, close friendship and cooperation with the Soviet Union and the countries of the anti-nazi coalition. Therefore, so far, the Fatherland Front programme directed the struggle only against the forces of the German fascist bloc. Its Bulgarian collaborators were not named, but they were implied by the overall political context of the programme.

The remaining seven items of the programme raised demands about: a) the immediate liberation of all people's fighters imprisoned by the fascist court and police; b) restoration of the democratic rights and freedoms and abolition of the fascist laws; c)wresting the army from the

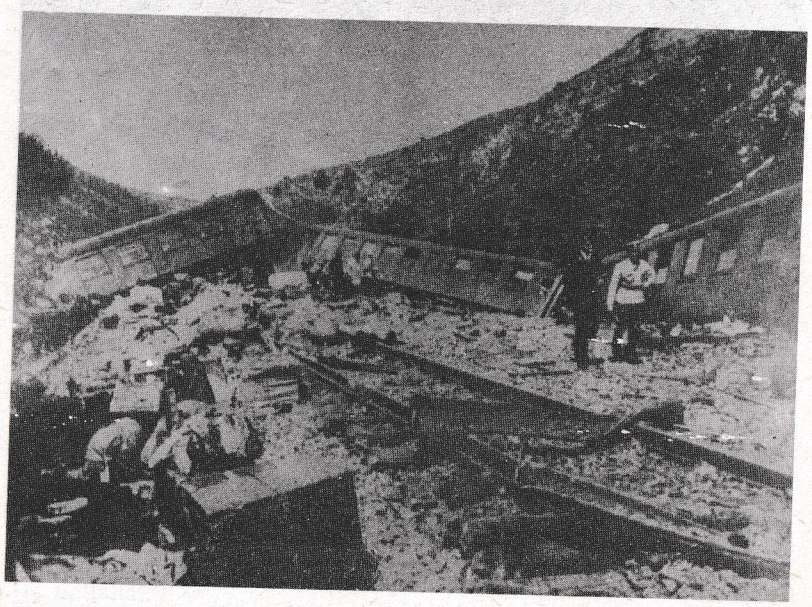
hands of monarcho-fascism; d) disbanding the fascist organizations, punishment to and rendering harmless of the fascist criminals; e) preservation of the people's labour and the resources of the country from foreign encroachments and ensuring its correct economic development as a free and independent state; f) ensuring the livelihood of the people, as well as the employment, income and human life of the working people; g) eradication of the fascist obscurantism, racial hatred and humiliation of the national honour of the Bulgarian people.

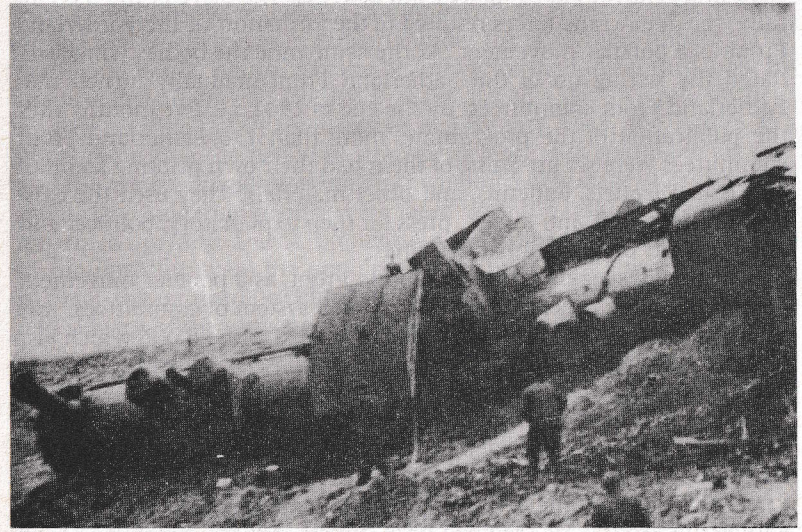
It was pointed out in the Fatherland Front programme that in order to achieve these ends it was necessary 'to establish a genuine national government, capable of pursuing the firm and consistent salvatory policy of the Fatherland Front'; therefore, after the overthrow of 'the present, perfidious, anti-popular, pro-nazi government', the Fatherland Front government would prepare 'the conditions for the convocation of the Grand National Assembly, which would determine the future form of government in Bulgaria and would create the necessary constitutional and material guarantees of the freedom, independence and flourishment of our country.'

In publishing the Fatherland Front programme, the BWP called upon all patriots to discuss and popularize it. The Party underscored the necessity both of rallying all patriots regardless of their political, national and religious affiliation, and of their consistent and resolute actions in implementing the programme. It was, above all, the duty of all 'most responsible anti-fascist patriots to unite the forces of all mass, political, economic and military organizations: the Agrarian Party, the Workers Party, the social democrats, democrats, radicals, etc., to take over the initiative of building up the Fatherland Front.' The BWP pointed out that any indecision, any hesitation in the building up and functioning of the Fatherland Front would be very dangerous, that the immediate setting up of the FF and the streamlining of the anti-fascist struggle by its single central leadership was in the interest of Bulgaria's salvation.

No arguments arose on the most essential points of the content of the program in the negotiations of Party representatives with the leaders of the democratic circles. This was indicative that the BWP had presented a platform, acceptable to all patriotic circles and representatives of the nation. Nevertheless, part of the non-fascist (but with anti-communist orientation) activists and leaders refused to join the Fatherland Front. They justified their refusal by stating that its formation was premature and not in conformity with the policy of armed struggle. The real reason for their refusal was their class limited policy and the placing of their narrow, personal and factious interests above the national.

*Georgi Dimitrov, 1942, the founder and inspirer of the Fatherland Front*





*Sabotage actions of the partisans, 1942-1943*

Both the content of the Fatherland Front programme and the struggle for the building of the national front and for the fulfilment of its platform, showed the creative skill of the BWP in solving the pressing tasks of the moment in accordance with the real situation. The Party did not include socialist tasks in the Fatherland Front programme, not because it gave up the struggle for socialism or because it saw any contradiction between the struggle for national liberation, independence and people's democracy, on the one hand, and the struggle for the elimination of capitalist exploitation, on the other. As a Party of a new Leninist type, the BWP correctly assumed that only by way of the complete combination of the struggle for freedom and democracy with the struggle for socialism, only by way of their coordination with the struggle of the peoples against nazism, headed by the Soviet Union, full success could be achieved. In this way by guiding the majority of the people to fight fascism and imperialist dependence by the Fatherland Front programme, the Party directed the revolutionary workers movement through the battles against fascism and imperialism to the struggle for socialism.

The BWP launched the building of the Fatherland Front with the left wing of the Agrarian Party, with the Zveno republican group, with left-wing representatives of the other non-fascist parties and circles, with independent public figures and activists. The drive of the BWP to rally the democratic forces resulted in the formation of the Fatherland Front as a popular movement. At the same time the bodies which initiated the setting up of the Fatherland Front gradually turned into Fatherland Front committees. By the end of 1942, i.e. five months after the publication of the programme, more than 136 Fatherland Front committees were set up. Some of them had their own printing facilities and issued leaflets, bulletins, and other materials. They used the existing underground anti-fascist press for their explanatory, political and underground organizational activities.

Generally speaking, the Fatherland Front, as a popular movement and, at the same time, as an organizational system of committees, was set up as early as 1942. This was a major success of the BWP, which justified the growing political activity of the anti-fascist forces. In this connection a secret nazi document dated March 25, 1943 pointed out: 'Greatly intensified work of the Fatherland Front can be observed in Bourgas and Sofia. It is evident in sabotages, attacks on and murders of German soldiers.'

The efforts of the BWP to establish national leadership of the Fatherland Front were crowned with success in the summer of 1943: a National Committee of the Fatherland Front was set up with representatives of the BWP, the left wing of the Agrarian Party, of the Zveno, of the Social Democratic Party and independent anti-fascists.



In September 1943, the National Committee of the Fatherland Front issued a leaflet to the Bulgarian people. In it, it stated its irreconcilable stand against the regents, illegally elected by an ordinary and not by a Grand National Assembly, as the Constitution stipulated. The National Committee opposed the government appointed by the regents.

All publications of the Fatherland Front committees worked for an alliance among workers, peasants, patriotic soldiers and the people's intelligentsia, for Bulgaro-Soviet friendship and a decisive struggle for the establishment of a people's democratic rule.

The Fatherland Front, under whose banner the entire anti-fascist struggle was waged, turned into a mass bulwark of the partisan movement.

## BUILDING UP OF THE PEOPLE'S LIBERATION INSURGENTS' ARMY

Conditions were created for offensive strategic actions by the armed anti-fascist forces in Bulgaria under the favourable impact of the Stalingrad battle, which was the beginning of the radical turnabout in the war developments. The BWP again played a decisive role in their implementation. With its directive of February 1943, the Party's CC pointed out that the period of strategic defence was coming to an end and the armed struggle was embarking upon a new stage of its development. The Bulgarian people were faced with the task of preparing for an armed uprising. The CC pointed out in its directive: the main forces of the uprising were the popular masses headed by the workers, the soldiers, the partisan detachments (its striking combat forces). The goal and slogans of the uprising were to establish the rule of the Fatherland Front, friendship and cooperation with the Soviet Union, understanding with its allies, joint struggle against fascism with the Balkan nations.

The CC of the BWP immediately ensured a new organizational structure of the partisan forces: in March and April of 1943 it distributed them in 12 insurgent operative zones, each one with headquarters, and all of them united by a People's Liberation Insurgents' Army (PLIA), commanded by a General Staff. In its documents the Party pointed out that the Fatherland Front committees were organs of the

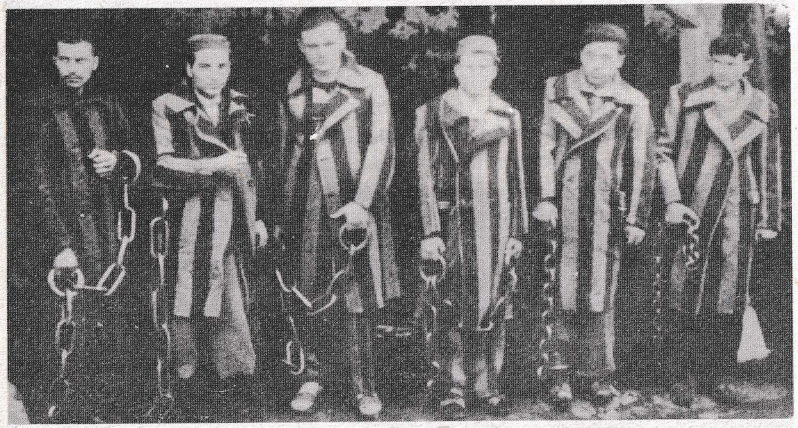
armed uprising and embryos of the people's democratic rule; the partisan detachments and combat groups were the embryos of the most important bodies of the people's rule – its armed forces: the army and the militia.

The undertakings of the BWP in setting up PLIA, i.e. in restructuring the armed forces of the anti-fascist struggle, corresponded to the new stage of its development and resulted in a fresh upsurge of the national liberation movement. More than 800 partisan actions and attacks were carried out in 1943 in Bulgaria. The fascist command noted that a domestic front came into being in February and March

*Dead Bulgarian partisans, 1944*

1943 in Bulgaria, which engaged 'a considerable portion of the time and efforts of the state authorities'. The minister of the interior characterized the internal situation on October 1, 1943, in the words: 'So far the authorities have been in fact on the defensive.' In fact, fascism constantly tried to make use of the numerical superiority of its armed forces, in order to rout the Insurgents' Army. About 20,000 army and police troops were hurled against its forces in the Sredna Gora region in the spring of 1943, and in the autumn of the same year their number was again increased. In the winter 100,000 army and police troops started a campaign against the partisan movement and the sympathizing popu-

*Political prisoners under sentence of death, in the Vidin prison, 1943*



lation all over the country. Resorting to cruel atrocities (execution of whole families of partisans and their helpers, including children and old people, without trial and questionings), the fascists tried to deprive the Insurgents' Army of its popular support and thus to rout it. They failed.

In 1943 the unarmed resistance was increasing irresistibly. The BWP organized and carried out a national action in defence of the Jews, against their deportation to the death camps. The action started in Sofia with a protest rally and a mass demonstration. The government and the nazis were forced to abandon the plan of the deportation of the Jews from Bulgaria. The majority of farm producers hid their food, sabotaged the requisitions and other undertakings of the authorities. In a number of towns the workes went on strike.

*The Hristo Botev Soldiers Partisan Batallion, December 1943*

*The Rila-Pirin detachment*

At the same time the BWP was expanding its influence among the soldiers. In 1942 and 1943 more than 1,300 servicemen passed over individually or in groups to the side of the partisans. The underground organizations in the troops stationed in the territories taken from Yugoslavia and Greece, established contacts and cooperation with the communist parties of these countries. A frontier unit (more than 60-strong), headed by its commander Dicho Petrov, joined the Yugoslav insurgents and served as the nucleus of the Hristo Botev partisan battalion, organized in 1943. The government set up a special kind of army – the state gendarmerie, in order to be able to rely on it. It also tried to organize a political mainstay for itself – the so-called 'social power' and counterpartisan groups – the so-called 'defence units', but met the steady opposition of the working people.

The brilliant victories of the Soviet Army at the beginning of 1944 and its advance to the Romanian frontier and approach to the Balkans, inspired still greater enthusiasm in the Bulgarian people. The BWP formed many new partisan detachments, and transformed the most active into national liberation brigades: one in April 1944, bearing the name Chavdar (with 437 fighters, east of Sofia) and three in May of the same year called the First and Second Sofia People's Liberation Brigades (west of Sofia) and the Georgi Dimitrov Soldiers' Brigade – on Yugoslav territory for joint work with the Yugoslav national liberation forces.

The correct political strategy and tactics of the BWP and the satisfactory military strategy and tactics of the PLIA, were a major obstacle in the attempts of monarcho-fascism to divert the people from the road of the armed struggle and to prevent the precipitation of a revolutionary crisis in Bulgaria.

## RIPENING OR THE REVOLUTIONARY SITUATION

In 1941 individual signs of a revolutionary situation began to emerge in Bulgaria. At that time there existed a crisis in the policy of the ruling classes and disagreement of the people with the pro-German policy of the government. By 1943,however, the activity of the people had not increased tangibly. In this way one of the major symptoms of a revolutionary situation was lacking. Without it the process of its formation could not be completed.

The development of the people's liberation movement before a

revolutionary situation had come to a head was correct. By the armed struggle, the BWP performed its tasks, set it by the objective development of the class and political struggle in Bulgaria and its international duty to the freedom-loving peoples, in their fight against fascism and led by the USSR. At the same time, the BWP avoided all revolutionary adventures. It did not organize an armed people's uprising, before the conditions were ripe for it. It started the preparation of its forces well in advance and prepared all other anti-fascist forces and the entire people for the emerging revolutionary situation.

In 1944, when the anti-fascist struggle in Bulgaria assumed unprecedented proportions under the favourable influence of the victories of the Soviet Army and its irresistible advance towards the Balkans, the signs of a revolutionary situation were becoming ever more tangible. In this situation the monarcho-fascists decided to appoint a new governmen, which would still more skilfully combine demagogy with repressions, and at the same time would accomplish an armistice with Britain and the US and would attempt to secure their support in preserving the regime from collapsing as a result of the rising popular revolution.

On June 1, 1944,Ivan Bagryanov, a skilful demagogue and uncompromised Germanophile, was entrusted to form a government. He began his manoeuvring by pretending that he wanted to break the alliance with the nazis as soon as he assumed the whole power from the hands of the military. In this way he hoped to win the good graces of the people, the support of the BWP and the Fatherland Front and to bring to an end the armed struggle. Bagryanov acted shrewdly, skilfully and in a well disguised manner. The anti-fascists were faced with a difficult situation. They had always voiced their readiness to render support to any government including a non-Fatherland Front one, which upheld anti-German positions. Bagryanov counted on deceiving them into believing that his govenment was such a one. However, the BWP was vigilant on its post and its leadership and, above all, the Foreign Bureau, headed by Georgi Dimitrov, immediately exposed Bagryanov's moves. The Party, the Fatherland Front, the Insurgents' Army and the majority of the people steadily continued their struggle. In the first month of Bagryanov's government, the partisan actions reached a record number–377 (or an average of 12 per day), in July, the second month, they went up to 543 and in August, the last month of his rule, to 669 actions, attacks, diversions and sabotages. The revolutionizing of the soldiers was being intensified. More than 1,700 servicemen passed over to the side of the partisans from January to August 1944. One part of them formed six battalions, acting in conjunction with the Yugoslavian people's liberation forces, while one detachment was incorporated in



the 81st regiment of the Greek Insurgent Army (ELAS). More than 300 new committees of the Fatherland Front were set up in the same period, making a total of 678, headed by the National Committee.

A major campaign, this time with a 300,000-strong army and police forces, was undertaken by the government in August 1944 against the Insurgents' Army, which consisted of 36 detachments, nine brigades, one division and hundreds of combat and sabotage groups supported by more than 200,000 partisan links, helpers, scouts, connections, suppliers and other associates. A 100,000-strong army was operating against the main forces of the PLIA. There were numerous casualties but this time, too, the high morale of the insurgents gained the upper hand over the numerical superiority of the enemy with its advantages in weapons, combat and other equipment.

The BWP, the Fatherland Front and the People's Liberation Insurgents' Army influenced the consciousness of the people by their powerful underground periodical press. They published and distributed more than 140 newspapers and bulletins. Through them, as well as through the leaflets, slogans and their universal oral explanatory work they raised the militant spirit of the people and brought forth their unshakeable resolve to fight until the ultimate victory over fascism.

By the end of August 1944, the revolutionary upsurge in the country was growing irresistibly and approached its climax. In this respect the victories of the Soviet Army, which surrounded 22,000-strong nazi divisions at Iasi and Kishinev, destroyed them and helped the Romanian people to overthrow the fascist dictatorship on August 23, exerted an extremely great influence. The ultimate deprivation of the Bulgarian monarcho-fascists of their foreign bulwark – the nazi Wehrmacht, and the overthrow of their dictatorship was now only a matter of days.

This domestic and international situation gave rise to a perfect revolutionary opportunity in Bulgaria. The ruling classes could not possibly preserve intact their domination. The oppressed classes did not want to succumb to oppression any more. Their position had further deteriorated and was becoming disastrous. The activity of the people greatly increased as well as their readiness to undertake brave and resolute actions against the ruling class, for the replacement of its rule by a people's democracy. This influenced the conduct of the various political forces, starting from the leading circles of the legal opposition (the non-fascist groupings of the opponents of the armed struggle with pro-Western orientation who refused to join the Fatherland Front), and going down to the strata of the people, who fought under the banner of the Fatherland Front and the leadership of the BWP.

# THE PEOPLE'S VICTORY OVER FASCISM

On August 26, 1944 the CC of the BWP issued a circular letter, in which it pointed out that Bulgaria was living through fateful days. The people and the patriotic army could alone save it from the defeat which its alliance with nazi Germany was bringing, and from the downfall that the usurper regents and the pro-German government were leading it to. Only a resolute armed struggle by the entire Bulgarian people and the army could bring about the ejection of the nazi oppressors, the establishment of friendship and union with the USSR, peace with Britain and the US, and the setting up of a government of the Fatherland Front ensuring conditions for a genuine people's democratic rule.

In tackling this historic task the Central Committee was giving firm orders, which were an overall instruction for starting a popular uprising. The organizing, by the Party, of military actions of the partisan detachments and the combat groups was envisaged everywhere: meetings, rallies, demonstrations and political strikes of workers and employees; the capturing of inhabited localities and establishing people's democratic rule by the units of the Insurgents' Army, by the masses of the workers, peasants and soldiers; enlisting the aid of the army in the nationwide struggle against the nazi oppressors and their Bulgarian stooges; consolidation of the Fatherland Front committees, the general and rapid setting up of new committees, which would become 'the acting organizers and leaders of the nationwide struggle and organs of the people's rule.'

The Central Committee pointed out: 'The Fatherland Front is the only political power, which can and should save the country, through brave, immediate and resolute action.'

On the same day the General Staff of the Insurgents' Army issued an order to the headquarters of the zones, whereby it ordered them to step up the attacks of the people's liberation forces against the enemy, to coordinate their actions with the struggle of the neighbouring nations and with the mutinous army troops: to mobilize fighters for the partisan detachments and combat groups, to strengthen the links with the Fatherland Front committees, to explain to the working people and the soldiers the latest developments, to establish Fatherland Front rule in towns and villages.

In the end of August the National Committee of the Fatherland Front published a *Manifesto for the Bulgarian People*. The 15 members of the Committee signed it. They were no longer afraid of the fascist repressions and called upon the people to wage a courageous and energetic struggle to establish a government of the Fatherland Front.



The Circular Letter No 4, issued by the Party's Central Committee, the Order of the General Staff of the Insurgens' Army and the Manifesto of the National Committee of the Fatherland Front contained a whole platform of the tasks of the popular uprising, which had to be carried out. No manoeuvres of fascism and reaction were in a position to divert the Party, to shake the forces of the Fatherland Front, to oppose the masses to the correct Party policy to check their rush to independent historic actions.

The circumstances forced the ruling clique to undertake new demagogical moves: Bagryanov's government declared that it would pursue a policy of neutrality and would disarm the German troops, which had crossed over from Romania to Bulgaia in retreat from the Soviet Army, following in their wake. The Wehrmacht units, stationed in Bulgaria, their staffs, depots, communications and bases, were not affected by this decision of the Bulgarian government. The nazis agreed that their troops retreating onto Bulgarian territory should be disarmed for the sake of appearances but, at the same time, should be transported along with their armament to the West, where they were preparing a new-

*The general political strike in Plovdiv on September 8, 1944*

base. They were interested in trying to prevent the Soviet Army from entering Bulgarian territory. Bagryanov's government started negotiations on armistice with Britain and the US with this aim in view.

When it became apparent that the Bulgarian monarcho-fascism could not win enough time to replace the nazi tutelage of its regime by a British-American one, and still less time to carry out this replacement, the legal opposition in the person of Konstantin Mouraviev, a functionary of the right wing of the BAP, offered its services to the regents in saving the system. The latter accepted the proposal and on September 2, 1944 replaced Bagryanov's government by the one appointed by Mouraviev. Representatives of the right wing of the BAP, leaders of the Democratic Party, of the National Party and others were included in the government. Individual ministers (like the Minister of War, General Ivan Marinov, and others) were unavowed sympathizers of the Fatherland Front. However, they could not essentially influence the government policies, in which, with demagogical designs, empty seats were left even for representatives of the Fatherland Front.

The government of the legal opposition aimed to ensure the pro-Western orientation of the country and not to allow the Soviet Army to persecute the nazi forces, which had found refuge on Bulgarian territory, to frustrate the popular uprising by means of a political diversion (and if it failed to achieve that, to secure British and American support in its suppression) or, in general, to save the bourgeois system from disitegration and to prevent the punishment of the monarcho-fascist rulers, employees and citizens, who had committed crimes against the people and mankind. The nazis did not oppose Mouraviev's government, because its success meant a change in the strategic situation in the Balkans, favourable to them.

Immediately after the announcement on the appointment of Mouraviev's government, the Central Committee of the BWP had a session at which it decided to step up the struggle against the anti-popular policy of the new government. The Hristo Botev radio station broadcast instructions in the same vein.

By its accusatory and political explanatory work the BWP ensured the correct understanding and attitude of the people to the situation and the pending tasks. It exposed Mouraviev's role and the reactionary nature of his policy was seen through and rejected by the people. The majority of the working people steadily followed the road mapped out by the BWP, the road to national salvation and social emancipation by means of armed struggle and an uprising.

Mouraviev's attempt to include representatives of the Fatherland Front in his cabinet and to shatter the militant alliance of the anti-fascist



forces, failed. The government failed to bring about an ebb in, or even to weaken the influx of volunteers to the striking force of the Fatherland Front, the Insurgents' Army. It was joined by ever growing numbers of revolutionized servicemen.The outcome of the people's duel with fascism was approaching fast.

The nazi headquarters and forces postponed their evacuation from the country. They stated that they would first withdraw their depots and afterwards their personnel. The government left them unmolested and thus forced the Soviet Union to declare war on Bulgaria, in the evening of September 5. It was only on the next day that the nazis started their evacuation. Some of them, however, continued to behave unceremoniously. Thus, for instance, on September 6, a German army column of 2,500 tried to liberate one of the nazi divisions transferred from Romania and not withdrawn to the west, which had been detained by the Bulgarian authorities in the town of Ihtiman. On this occasion, however, the Bulgarian army troops, prepared and led by the town organization of the BWP, offered an organized resistance and foiled the German plan.

The Bulgarian people received the news of the declaration of war by the Soviet Union, with mixed feelings: their boundless joy that they were to receive fraternal assistance in the decisive battle against monarcho-fascism was combined with the deepest indignation at the Bulgarian government, which continued the anti-Soviet, anti-popular policy of its predecessors. While waiting for the liberating Red Army the people redoubled their revolutionary energy. The BWP led them in demonstrations and strikes. In the evening of September 5, the Politburo of the CC, jointly with the General Staff of the People's Liberation Insurgents' Army worked out a plan of the uprising and decided to deal the main blow on the eve of September 9, in Sofia. It was to be delivered by the forces of the revolutionized army units, combat groups and partisans and was preceded by mass demonstrations, strikes and rallies of the working people in the capital.

On September 6, the BWP organized a strike of the tram workers in Sofia. Demonstrations took place in the city centre. Policemen and nazis fired against the demonstration and wounded several people. On the next day the speaker at a mass rally of the Sofia population perished in another encounter with the police.

The miners in Pernik went on strike on September 7. led by the BWP. The police opened fire against their demonstration and killed six and wounded 13. The working people in Pleven and Silistra broke open the prisons, freed the political prisoners and staged demonstrations jointly with them. In both towns there were casualties.In Plovdiv

*Todor Zhivkov greeting the partisan brigade with the victory*

the Party organized a strike of the tobacco workers, railwaymen and other working people. Units of the PLIA attacked 61 inhabited localities and in some of them established a Fatherland Front rule.

On September 8, the strike in Plovdiv grew into a general strike, which ended with the seizing of local power by the working people. Strikes swept over Gabrovo, Assenovgrad and other towns. Under the pressure of the people all prisons were opened and the political prisoners were freed. The BWP roused the people to an uprising in Varna and Gabrovo. Soldiers' units in the region of Sveti Vrach (Yané Sandanski),



Trun, Bourgas, Varna and elsewhere rose in mutinies. The advance of the Soviet Army into Bulgaria started on the same day. The popular uprising was already in full swing. Merging with the triumphant campaign of the Soviet liberating troops and with the fervent enthusiasm of the people who welcomed them, it assumed extraordinary might and scope.

Early in the night of September 9, 1944 insurgent forces including army units, combat groups, partisans and armed working people, dealt the main blow in Sofia with breathtaking speed.Under the leadership of the CC of the BWP, the National Committee of the Fatherland Front and the General Staff of the PLIA, they took over the central state apparatus and established a government of 16, headed by Kimon Georgiev. Of them, four were representatives of the BWP, four of the Zveno political group, two of the Social Democratic Party and two were independent public figures. As a whole, power was in the hands of the Fatherland Front committees in which the representatives of the BWP played a decisive role. In this way the leading role of the Partyboth in the uprising and in the establishment of people's democratic rule, was naturally recognized and confirmed.

Early in the morning on September 9, the proclamation of the first Fatherland Front government, read over Radio Sofia, resounded over towns and villages. It stated that the former government had left the nazi troops in Bulgaria armed and that they threatened two Bulgarian armies with capture and destruction. The Fatherland Front assumed the government of the country, in order to save it from downfall. The new government would immediately join all its forces and means with the Soviet Union and the other countries of the anti-nazi coalition to drive the Germans out of the Balkans. It would do its best to establish indissoluble relations with the Soviet Union and sincere friendship with the neighbouring and all democratic states.

The proclamation had the effect of a signal for independent actions of the working people.The people, the partisans and the soldiers merged into a united insurgent force, which swept the entire country and destroyed the fascist police and state apparatus. The insurgents disarmed and arrested the nazis, gendarmes, policemen and reactionaries, crushed their resistance in dozens of towns and stopped the invasion of nazi troops from the west.

Simultaneously with the establishment of the Fatherland Front government, its armed forces, the people's militia and the people's army were created. Their command and personnel was made up by partisans and other active participants in the struggle including political prisoners, concentration camps inmates, revolutionized army service-

*The partisans, soldiers and working people of Belovo railway station merged into a single insurgent force on September 9, 1944*

*Welcoming the Soviet troops who first arrived in Sofia on September 16, 1944*

*Sofia citizens in a cordial conversation with Red Army men*

men, young volunteers and other anti-fascists, patriots and participants in the final storming of fascism. The uprising set free the revolutionary energy and creativeness of the people. They took advantage of the decisive assistance of the Soviet Army, of its presence in Bulgaria as a barrier against the resistance of reaction from within and without the country, to liberate themselves from foreign imperialist dependence, and from the monarcho-fascist dictatorship, as well as from social oppression.

The balance of the class and political forces and the predominating influence of the BWP over the people, won by the correct Party policy in the organization and leadership of the three-year-long unequal struggle against fascism, in the setting up of the Fatherland Front and the PLIA, in the revolutionization of the majority of the soldiers who were attracted to the armed struggle in Bulgaria and in the neighbouring countries, made it possible to turn the people's democratic revolution into a socialist revolution.

The people, headed by the BWP, acted in the spirit of Lenin's instruction to do everything possible to merge the three streams of the uprisings – the workers, the peasants and the soldiers, into a single victorious uprising. With their revolutionary instinct they correctly assessed that the hour of which the CC of the BWP spoke in a leaflet from December 1941, had come and that'... in spite of all persecutions the communist sentiments are growing and will grow still more powerfully and a time will come when they will sweep the whole country...'

After winning political freedom and national independence, the working people, rallied around the Fatherland Front under the leadership of the working class and its communist vanguard, established their own people's democratic rule and at the same time, through this form, implemented the dictatorship of the proletariat. In this way the popular victory over fascism turned into the beginning of the socialist revolution in Bulgaria.

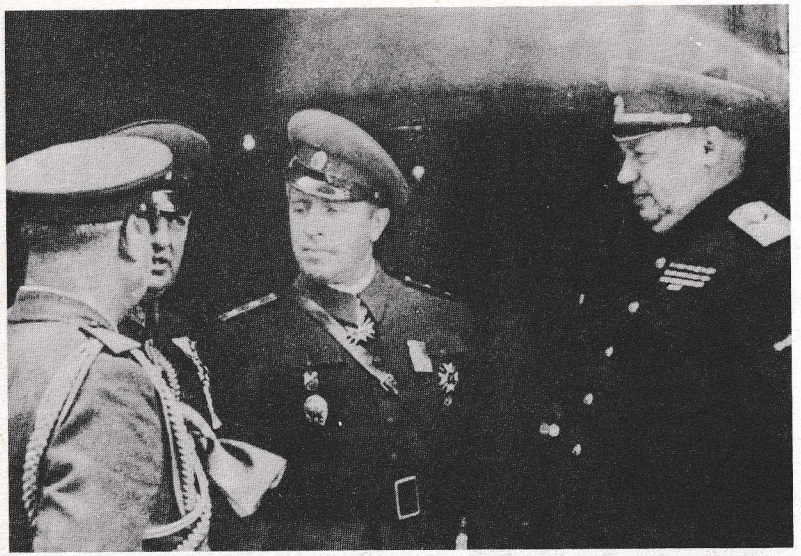
## THE PATRIOTIC WAR OF BULGARIA AGAINST NAZI GERMANY (1944-45)

After the Bulgarian people's victory over internal fascism, the primary international task of Fatherland Front Bulgaria was to take part in the Second World War against nazi Germany. The Western border of Bulgaria was threatened by German troops, which were covering the withdrawal of their half-a-million-strong army from Greece and the Aegean Islands through Yugoslavia and the middle reaches of the Danube. The German troops were advancing towards important Bulgarian frontier centres and captured the town of Koula, occupying it for several days. The repulsion of the invaders was inconceivable without a military coordination, assistance and fraternal cooperation with the Soviet Liberating Army. At the same time Bulgaria had to come out of the international isolation in which it was placed by the monarcho-fascist governments, to conclude armistices with the USSR, Britain and the US, to improve its international situation and to fulfil its international duty by taking part in the struggle for the liberation of the peoples of Yugoslavia, Hungary and other countries.

On September 10, 1944 the Fatherland Front government declared war on Germany. The Bulgarian people's anti-fascist struggle entered upon a new stage. At the appeal of the BWP, rapid and universal military mobilization was carried out. Tens of thousands of volunteers joined the ranks of the people's army. About 40,000 of the members of the Workers Youth League went to the front as volunteers. A broad popu-

*The Bulgarian forces going to the front, are seen off*

*Bulgarian troops are welcomed by the Yugoslav population of Nis and Maribor.*



*Marshal F. I. Tolbukhin, Commander-in-chief of the Third Ukrainian Front, and General Vladimir Stoychev, Commander-in-chief of the First Bulgarian Army*

lar movement developed under the slogan 'Everything for the front, everything for the victory!' to assist the military forces fighting the enemy. On September 17, 1944 Bulgaria's whole territory was liberated from the nazis. Three Bulgarian armies totalling 448,000 soldiers and officers, under the operative command of the Third Ukrainian Front advanced against the enemy on Yugoslav territory. They had two basic tasks: to guard the left flank of the Third Ukrainian Front and to cut off the retreat of the nazi forces from Greece, along the valleys of the rivers Vardar, Ibar and Morava to the north. The leaders of Yugoslavia and of its people's liberation army gave their agreement to the Bulgarian People's Army to operate on Yugoslav territory.

The Bulgarian People's Army reached several points in the line of the retreat by the nazis after many hard battles under extremely difficult conditions. In four major heroic operations named after the town of Nis, Kossovo Polé, the village of Stratsin and the town of Kumanovo, the rivers Bregalnitsa and Strumitsa, the three Bulgarian armies fulfilled their tasks. Units of the People's Liberation Army of Yugoslavia joined in their operations. The militant friendship of the Bulgarian and

*G. Dimitrov and F.I. Tolbukhin*

Yugoslav peoples in their joint struggle against the common enemy and oppressor, was made sacred by the blood shed in common. In conjunction with the Third Ukrainian Front and in cooperation with forces of the Yugoslav People's Liberaton Army from September 10 till the end of November 1944, the Bulgarian People's Army made its contribution to the liberation of Macedonia and Serbia. Thus the first period of Bulgaria's Patriotic War came to an end.

The second period continued from December 1944 to May 1945. It included the operations which the 130,000-strong First Bulgarian Army (included in the composition of the Third Ukrainian Front), undertook on Yugoslav, Hungarian and Austrian territory. Mastering the military art and combat skill of the Soviet Army, the First Bulgarian Army, in constant battles and manoeuvring, covered with honour the militant road from the Balkan Range to the Alps. Its soldiers and commanders performed miracles of individual and mass heroism. In the epic battles in March and April 1945, known as the River Drava and River Mur operations, the Bulgarian soldiers, shoulder to shoulder with the Soviet heroes won glorious victories, which were marked by artillery salvos in Moscow.

In March 1945, the First Bulgarian Army was pursuing the enemy on Austrian territory and in the foothills of the Alps it welcomed the news of nazi Germany's capitulation. In the war against an experienced foe, the Bulgarian People's Army showed high ideological and political consciousness, a heroic spirit and valuable combat qualities. Thanks to the great organizational, explanatory and educational work of the BWP (renamed the Bulgarian Workers Party – Communists, at the end of September 1944), thanks to the invaluable assistance of the Soviet Union and its army, the Bulgarian People's Army fulfilled the tasks set to it. It inflicted heavy losses on the German troops: it killed, wounded and took prisoner more than 60,000 troops, captured as trophies of war a large quantity of tanks, aircraft, artillery, mine-throwers, machine guns, guns, munitions, military and other equipment and materials.

The victories of the Bulgarian People's Army were paid for with great sacrifices: 31,922 were killed, wounded or missing. Vast quantities of material resources were used.

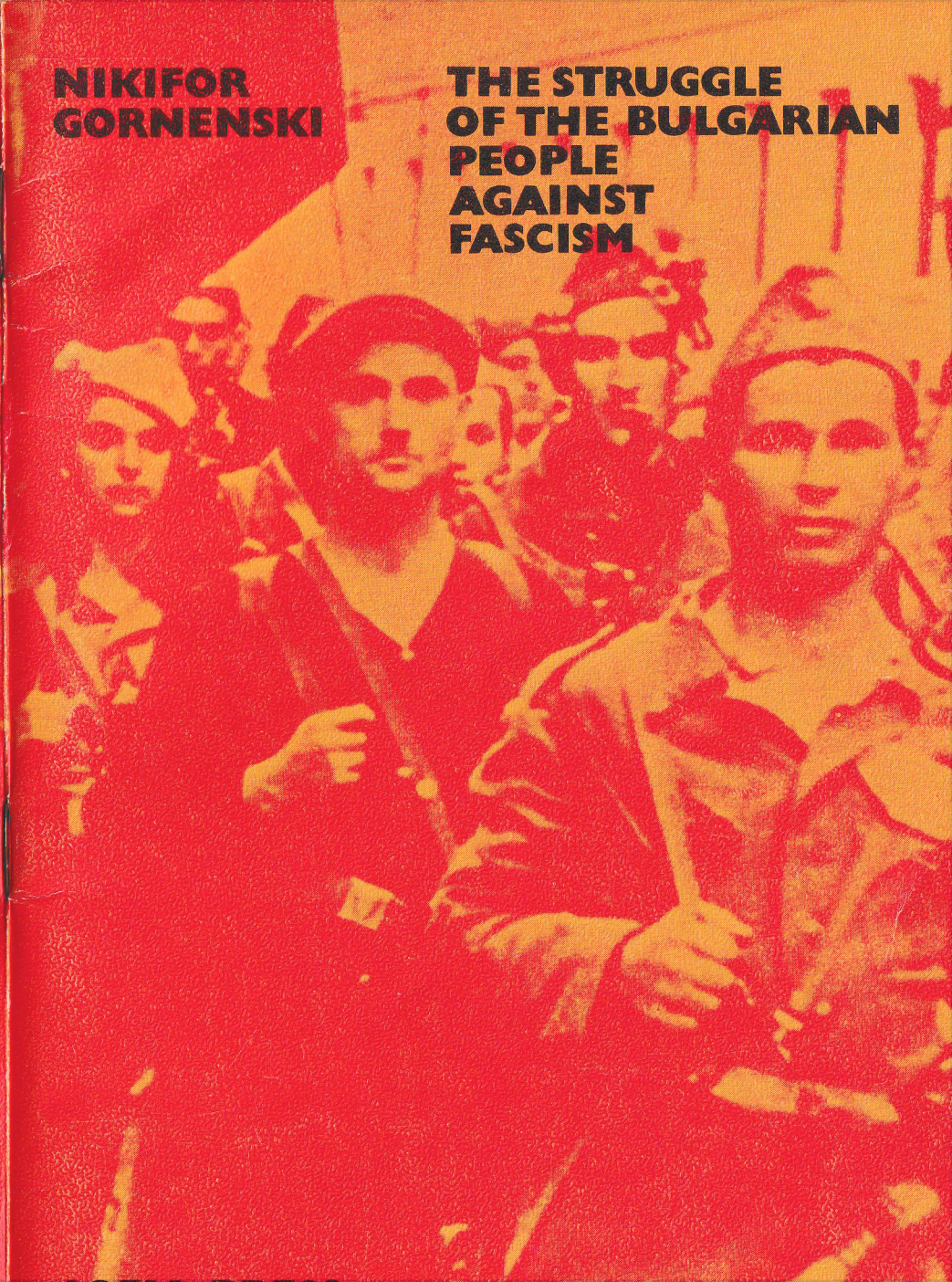
Bulgaria's Patriotic War was a valuable contribution to the struggle of the anti-nazi coalition for the ultimate defeat of nazi Germany. With their blood the Bulgarian people washed away the shameful stain that the monarcho-fascist power blemished Bulgaria with by attaching it to the nazi Reich, the fascist axis and its aggression. Bulgaria's Patriotic War found wide public recognition, particularly among the peoples of

the USSR, Yugoslavia and Hungary; it enhanced the prestige and improved the international situation of Bulgaria; it placed it on the side of the democratic peoples; gave it the right to aspire for a dignified and just peace treaty.

Alongside the great importance which the Patriotic War played in ending Bulgaria's international isolation, its successful end contributed, to a considerable extent, to the normalization of public and political life inside the country, to consolidating the historic achievements of the September 9 Revolution, which was people's democratic in form and socialist in content.

Bulgaria's Patriotic War was a natural continuation of the Bulgarian people's armed struggle, under the leadership of the BWP, against the monarcho-fascist dictatorship and the oppression of nazi Germany. With the victory of September 9, 1944, the people put an end to the innumerable evils inflicted on them by the Bulgarian and German fascism. By continuing the struggle against nazism to its victorious end, the Bulgarian people wiped away the shame and the evils inflicted on their country, and won their place in the family of freedom-loving nations. In this way under the leadership of the BWP, they fulfilled their greatest patriotic task, their greatest duty to themselves and to the united front of the peoples, fighting against fascism under the leadership of the Soviet Union.

The Party of the Bulgarian communists was a universally acknowledged organizer, leader and inspirer both of the strugle waged by their own people against fascism from the first to the last day, and of Bulgaria's Patriotic War. With its resolve and creative skill in tackling the historical tasks and in winning the people's rights and freedoms, national independence, state sovereignty and a bright future for Bulgaria, the Party became consolidated as the most patriotic national force. At the same time it most consistently supported the international interests of the proletariat of the socialist state and of the entire progressive mankind. Along its road the Bulgarian people achieved both the victory over domestic and foreign fascism and the triumph of socialism in Bulgaria.

NIKIFOR GORNENSKI

# THE STRUGGLE OF THE BULGARIAN PEOPLE AGAINST FASCISM